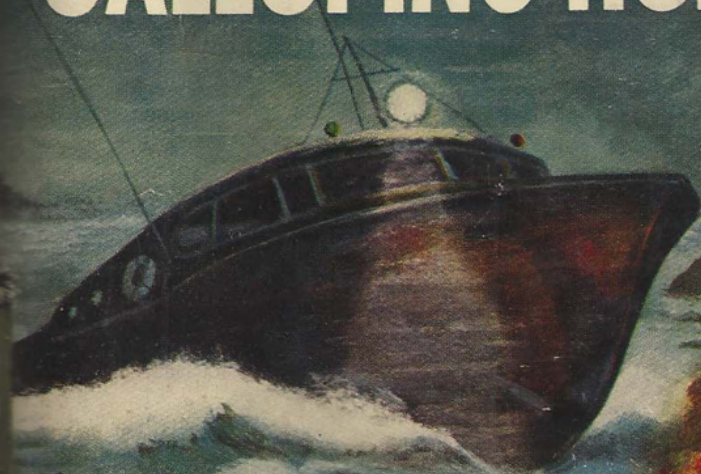


**A KEN HOLT Mystery**

# **THE MYSTERY OF THE GALLOPING HORSE**



**By BRUCE CAMPBELL**

THE MYSTERY OF THE GALLOPING HORSE  
A KEN HOLT Mystery  
By Bruce Campbell

The KEN HOLT Mystery Stories

- 1 The Secret of Skeleton Island
- 2 The Riddle of the Stone Elephant
- 3 The Black Thumb Mystery
- 4 The Clue of the Marked Claw
- 5 The Clue of the Coiled Cobra
- 6 The Secret of Hangman's Inn
- 7 The Mystery of the Iron Box
- 8 The Clue of the Phantom Car
- 9 The Mystery of the Galloping Horse
- 10 The Mystery of the Green Flame
- 11 The Mystery of the Grinning Tiger
- 12 The Mystery of the Vanishing Magician
- 13 The Mystery of the Shattered Glass
- 14 The Mystery of the Invisible Enemy
- 15 The Mystery of Gallows Cliff
- 16 The Clue of the Silver Scorpion
- 17 The Mystery of the Plumed Serpent
- 18 The Mystery of the Sultan's Scimitar

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CONTENTS

# **CHAPTER**

## **I GRIM WARNING**

**II OUTSMARTED**

**III HOOFBEATS IN THE NIGHT**

**IV GALLOPING GHOST**

**V THE HIDDEN WATCHER**

**VI SETTING UP CAMP**

**VII PLOTTING THE DIG**

**VIII SETTING A TRAP**

**IX THE ENEMY STRIKES**

**X TWENTY-FOUR-HOUR GUARD**

**XI DIGGING IN VAIN**

**XII UNEXPLAINED MISTAKE**

**XIII STRANGE FISHERMEN**

**XIV THE ENEMY CLOSES IN**

**XV THE TELLTALE FOOTPRINTS**

**XVI DESPERATE SITUATION**

**XVII DOWN IN THE PIT**

**XVIII FIGHTING WITH FLAME**

**XIX BATTLE IN THE WATER**

**XX BACK TO THE DIGGING**

# CHAPTER I

## GRIM WARNING

The bulb of the desk light cast a harsh glare on the faces surrounding the big scarred piece of furniture that had supported Pop Allen's typewriter and feet for many years. Pop leaned back. The creaking of his chair spring broke the silence that had fallen over the office of the *Brentwood Advance*, the weekly newspaper that served the small town of Brentwood.

There were six people grouped around the desk. Three of them were Allens-Pop, his older son Bert, and his younger son Sandy-all with huge, powerful figures topped with the bright red hair that was the Allen trademark. Standing beside Sandy was Ken Holt, his slim, wiry figure and jet-black hair setting him off in marked contrast to his closest friend. Next to Ken sat his father, Richard Holt, one of the top reporters of the Global News Service. The resemblance between the two Holts was obvious. Except for a slight graying of the black hair over his temples, Richard Holt could have been mistaken for Ken's brother.

The sixth man, Tom Golden, stood a little outside the close circle around the desk. He too was big-as tall as the Allens, but leaner and more rangy. His neat, dark suit jacket was unbuttoned and hung slightly open, yielding a glimpse of the leather strap that held a shoulder holster in place under his left arm. His attention seemed to be divided between the men near him and the car parked directly in front of the newspaper office and visible through the big front window.

A peaceful summer evening was settling down over Brentwood. The last glow of light was dying out of the sky. From the highway a few blocks distant sounded the muted rumble of truck traffic. A church bell tolled nine long, mournful notes.

Pop Allen finally spoke, as the last note was dying into silence. "It sounds a little weird, Dick. Kidnapping Ken to ..."

"It's weird, all right," Richard Holt agreed. "But it's true nevertheless."

"Give it to us in detail." Pop began to stuff his pipe with tobacco from the jar on his cluttered desk.

"Well," Holt said, "you know I've been working on a series of stories about the New York waterfront racketeers?"

Ken nodded. "We've been reading every word of them, Dad. That's

pretty strong stuff you've been writing."

His father grinned briefly. "And I've just scratched the surface. But if you've been reading the stories, you know something about the organized stealing of cargo from the docks, and how the gangs go about collecting protection money from ship owners, truckers-from practically everybody who has business on or around the docks. Those who don't pay for protection get their stuff stolen. And the gangs are clever. Their protection fees are just low enough so that it's cheaper for a trucker or a ship owner to pay off than to hire a lot of extra guards to protect his merchandise."

"But why don't the truckers and ship owners go to the police?" Bert Allen asked.

"That's a good question, Bert," Holt said. "The police tell me there have been very few complaints from the water front-although they know this sort of thing has been going on for a long time. Occasionally the police are called in when a dock guard has been beaten up, but the complainants are never able to identify the suspects the police arrest. Or so they say. It's the old story of scaring off witnesses. And besides, I'm pretty sure some police officials are being paid off by the protection racketeers." He fished in his pocket for a cigarette and lit it before he went on.

"My part in all this began when I got a call one day recently from a minor underworld character I'd met several years ago-when he was being held for murder. I'd happened to know that he hadn't been anywhere near the spot at the crucial moment and my testimony saved him from a murder charge. So when he phoned me not long ago, he reminded me that I'd once done him a favor and now he wanted to return it."

A car drove past the *Advance* office and Tom Golden watched it, stiffly alert, until it moved out of sight.

"The man was scared," Holt continued. "He said he had a story for me that would blow the lid off the waterfront rackets. He'd been mixed up in one of the dock gangs, had fallen out with his boss, and knew he had to get under cover to protect himself. I helped him to get into hiding and then started my article series from the leads he gave me and the additional material I began digging up for myself."

"Why hadn't *he* gone to the police?" Sandy asked.

Holt shrugged. "He said he didn't trust them, that he was sure some of the waterfront police squads were mixed up in the racket.

"You know what happened then," Holt went on. "The stories caused quite a commotion, and finally the grand jury announced that it was going to open an investigation. That's when the racket chiefs began to worry a little. A grand-jury investigation takes things out of the hands of the police. The jury has its own investigating force and

its special prosecuting attorney. So when I was billed as a witness in the forthcoming grand-jury hearings, I got a letter in the mail-a warning that if I testified I'd be taken care of in a way I wouldn't like."

Bert Allen's red eyebrows arched. "A tactical error," he muttered. "They should have known you couldn't be scared off."

"I never have been yet," Holt admitted. He grinned up at Tom Golden's towering figure. "This bodyguard idea wasn't mine. I like to think I can take care of myself, but Global News apparently has less faith in me. Granger hired Tom Golden, and he's been beside me ever since."

"Good," Pop Allen muttered. "Personally I'm glad to see him there."

"Me too," Ken agreed. And then he added, "Usually I think of Granger as having ink in his veins instead of blood, but once in a while he proves he has some human feeling."

"Well, right now Granger and I both have something else to worry about," Holt said grimly. "I've had another warning letter, and this one threatens to get you, Ken. We've had a taste of that sort of thing once before"- he looked over his son's head to Pop Allen-"and so have you, thanks to your blessed habit of getting mixed up in other people's business."

The Allens and Ken knew only too well what Richard Holt was talking about. They could all remember the first time Ken had found himself in a desperate situation arising out of his father's profession. The Allens, though strangers, had rallied to his support and had stuck with him until both he and his father had been rescued from danger. That adventure, known as *The Secret of Skeleton Island*, had been the beginning of the friendship that now cemented the Holts and the Allens so closely together. It had also been the beginning of a new life for Ken.

Motherless since early childhood, he had been living in boarding schools while his father traveled the world in search of the stories that had made him famous. But the boarding-school life had ended when Ken met the Allens. The whole family-Pop, Bert, Sandy, and tiny Mom Allen-had insisted that he make his home with them. And, from that time on, Ken and Sandy had been involved in several mysterious adventures and had shared many close escapes. Ken's stories of those adventures, and Sandy's accompanying photographs, always appeared in the Allen-owned *Brentwood Advance* and were usually snapped up by Global News. Granger, New York manager of that world-wide news service, had been known to say that he respected what he called Ken's nose for news almost as much as he did Richard Holt's.

"But, Dad," Ken protested now, "you don't take that warning

seriously, do you? And even if you do—

“We all take it seriously,” Tom Golden broke in brusquely. “This is a situation that calls for unusual protective measures. These gangs are part of a big crime syndicate—an outfit involving millions of dollars. And they’re willing to spend millions to protect themselves too. We know they’ve been tailing Holt for weeks. They know all about him—and that means they know all about you too. And twenty-four-hour-a-day police protection isn’t as safe a bet as having you hidden some place where you’ll never be found.”

“But, Dad—” Ken began again.

This time his father interrupted him. “I’m afraid Golden’s right, Ken. With his help—and I don’t mind admitting I’ve occasionally been glad to have it—I expect to be able to take care of myself. But we can’t take care of you too. And the one way the gang could get at me—and they’ve obviously figured it out by now—is through you.”

Pop Allen spoke through a cloud of smoke. “I see Dick’s point. The only way he can be pried loose from his determination to testify before the grand jury is by using you as a lever, Ken. So as long as you stay here—where they know how to find you—you won’t be doing your father or the jury any good.”

Richard Holt turned his sober gaze on the man who had been such a good friend to his son and to himself. “And there’s another thing, Pop,” he said. “Sandy and Ken are as close as brothers, and Sandy’s as much my son as Ken is yours. I take for granted the gang knows that too. So I won’t feel really safe unless they’re both out of sight somewhere.”

Bert spoke before his younger brother could explode into protest. “I see your point too, Dick,” he said. “But here’s something else: neither Ken alone, nor Sandy and Ken, could stay in hiding forever. Wouldn’t it be better to face the danger right here and now?”

“It won’t be forever,” Richard Holt replied. “The grand jury starts its hearing on the twelfth—just four days from now. I’m to be called first, and as soon as I’ve told my story I’ll have done all the damage I can do. After that, it will do no one any good to threaten me.”

“What I don’t quite understand, Dad,” Ken said, “is why the racketeers are afraid to let you testify. Haven’t you already told everything you know in those stories?”

Dick Holt shook his head. “There are a good many things which I honestly believe to be true—things I can testify to on oath—which I haven’t printed because I didn’t have enough proof to back them up. I don’t have to be able to prove everything I tell the grand jury. They’ll accept my statement, on oath. After listening to me and all their other witnesses, they may decide that racketeering does exist along the water front, and that X, Y, and Z appear to be involved in it. The jury

will then indict those three men, which means that they will instruct the prosecuting attorney to arrest them and bring them to trial. Then, of course, the cases against them will have to be proved. But by that time there'll be plenty of experts on hand to dig up the proof."

"The reason why the racketeers are worried right now," Tom Golden put in, "is that Mr. Holt will name names in his testimony-and right away those men can be subpoenaed-brought in to testify themselves. A lot of them are smart enough to stand up to the kind of questioning they'll get, and not break down and admit anything. But there are always some who'll get tripped up by their own lies. And when they can see that they'll be faced with a charge of perjury, for lying to a jury, they'll probably start to make deals to save their own skins. They'll agree to tell all they know in the hope of getting lighter sentences for their own part in the business. And right then is when the whole organization will begin to crumble. So you can see why Mr. Holt's testimony is so important. It could be the beginning of the end of the whole racketeering situation."

"So if you two will kindly disappear," Richard Holt said, looking first at Ken and then at Sandy, "I'll get on about my-" He broke off to glance upward at the tall man beside him.

Golden's body had straightened into rigidity. A car was passing the office, heading toward the highway. It drew near Golden's own car, parked just in front of the office, and now seemed to be continuing on past. It was abreast of the hood of Golden's car when there was the sound of a dull thump-something heavy striking against metal.

As Golden whirled toward the front door his right hand darted inside his coat. "Stay here!" he barked.

Golden seemed to reach the door in a split second, but already the passing car, accelerating swiftly, was out of sight. Golden stood on the sidewalk an instant, looking after it, and then approached his own car. On the far side of it he stooped over briefly, and then straightened and came back toward the *Advance* office. His face was grim as he returned to the silent, waiting group around the desk and dropped something heavy on the scarred surface.

Ken stared. "Pineapples!" he said blankly.

There were two of the spiny fruit, tied together by a ribbon wrapped around the stiff leaves. One was much larger than the other. Golden's finger pointed to the labels attached to each. The label on the large pineapple read *Richard Holt*. The tag on the smaller one said *Ken Holt*.

"I don't get it," Sandy said. "What does it mean?"

"You're a little young to remember the gang wars in Chicago some years ago," Golden told him. "They used hand grenades on each other in those days, but they didn't call them hand grenades. They called



them pineapples.” He poked at the fruit with his gun. “This is what I call a very effective warning.”

## CHAPTER II

### OUTSMARTED

For an instant they all stared at the innocent-looking pineapples.

Then Pop reached for the phone, but his hand stopped in mid-air. "I don't suppose you caught the license number of that car?" he asked Golden.

The man whose job it was to guard Richard Holt was slipping his gun back into its holster. "Wouldn't do any good if I had," he said. "They're probably a long way from here by now. Anyway, all you could get them for is the violation of a city ordinance prohibiting the dumping of garbage on a public thoroughfare."

Richard Holt tamped out his cigarette and looked at his son. "Need any more convincing?"

Ken was sober. "You win," he said. "O.K., Sandy?"

"Is it settled that I'm in on this too?" Sandy asked.

"Definitely," Holt told him.

Pop nodded his agreement. "Might as well get rid of both of them for a couple of days." He forced a smile. "Bert and I will have a little peace around here for a change. The question now is: where are they going to go?"

"I've always wanted to see the African jungles," Sandy pointed out. "As long as we have to go someplace—"

Bert, ignoring his brother's flippancy, spoke over Sandy's head to Dick Holt. "We not only have to pick a safe spot for them," he said. "We also have to figure out how they can get there without your friends following."

"I know. That'll be part of our job," Holt agreed. "But let's decide on the place first. I haven't had any ideas yet. The letter that mentioned Ken just reached me today, and Golden and I started out here right away."

Bert began to scramble suddenly among the papers on his desk. "I just had an idea. Now if I can only find that—Here it is!" He was pulling a letter from beneath a pile of copy paper. "This is from an old schoolmate of mine, Tod Hayworth. When I graduated and began to dig up news, Tod began to dig up ruins. He's an archaeologist—a good one too, I gather. Let me read you part of this and see if you don't have the same thought I had.

" 'So I'll be leaving soon for Claytown,'" Bert read, " 'in southern New Jersey about three miles from Delaware Bay. I'm on the track of something that could be mighty important to my career—my first real find on my own. It's well known that there were glass furnaces near

Claytown at the time of the Revolution. Conditions there have always been perfect for glassmaking: plenty of good sand, wood for the furnaces, and oyster shell for lime. But I've got a clue to a glasshouse that may have started a good deal earlier than any we've known about in the area-that may even have been among the half-dozen first industries in Colonial America."

Bert glanced up. The others were all listening to him thoughtfully. "Get to the point of this," Pop prodded.

" 'Anyhow, it's worth a gamble,'" Bert read on. " 'And when I say gamble, that's certainly what I mean. Haven't found anyone who will finance the project, so Dan Galen-he's my friend and associate here at the university-and I are sinking our own money into the thing. It'll probably take every penny we've got, but if we find evidence of that glasshouse site, it'll be worth it. Any chance of you spending your vacation with us? We can promise plenty of fresh air and exercise-with emphasis on the exercise. Seriously, though, it would be great to see you. Haven't laid eyes on your red head since before I left for that South American dig two years ago, and a sight of it would encourage me right now. Besides, the fishing at Claytown ought to be great. We'll allow you a half-hour off a day to try it out.'"

Bert flipped the sheet onto his desk. "Tod's arriving in Claytown today and can be reached at the inn there until he gets his tents set up out on the dig." He looked up. "What do you think of that as a hide-out? Who'd look for Ken and Sandy at an archaeological dig? Why, they can't even spell the word!"

Sandy had already reached for a map of New Jersey and was spreading it out on his father's desk. His finger moved along the southern shore line of the state-a shore line indented by many little bays and harbors. "Here's Claytown."

The others gathered around to see the spot his finger indicated. Claytown was a tiny circle on the map, close to the blue area of Delaware Bay. Alongside it a thin wavy blue line marked Claytown Creek's meandering route toward the bay.

"I'll bet there is good fishing there," Sandy murmured. "And I always say there's nothing better than fish fresh out of the water, fried in plenty of butter, and with-"

Pop's snort of disgust cut him off. "This is serious business," he said brusquely. "Just forget about food for a minute." Then he added to Bert, "It sounds to me as if your friend had troubles enough of his own, without our dumping Ken and Sandy on his doorstep. If he's risking everything he's got-"

"But that's just the point, Pop," Bert interrupted. "Ken and Sandy can wield shovels as well as I can. Tod will be more than glad to have them if they'll do a little work."

“Wait a minute!” Sandy shouted. “We’re not going to spend the next several days breaking our backs!”

“Would you rather spend them getting blown up?” Tom Golden asked. “I picked a live bomb out of our car the other day. I might not be around to do the same for you, if the occasion arose.”

Ken was staring at his father. “Dad!” he said. “You didn’t tell us that! I thought these pineapples were the first sign of trouble you’d had, except for the warning letters.”

Dick Holt glared briefly at Tom Golden. “It wasn’t much of a bomb,” he protested. “Anyhow, that sort of thing is one of Tom’s responsibilities and he takes it very seriously. We never step into the car until he’s looked it over. Now let’s get this settled,” he added briskly. “If Bert really thinks you two would be acceptable guests at this archaeological dig, I must say I can’t think of a better place for you to hole up in for a few days. And a little digging won’t hurt either of you.”

“I’ve always wanted to see a dig,” Ken said. But his voice sounded absent-minded and there was worry in his eyes as he watched his father’s face.

“So have I,” Sandy muttered. “I was only kidding. I don’t mind digging-not much, anyway.” Bert crossed the room to his own desk and telephone.

“I’ll see if I can get hold of Tod and break the news to him,” he said, “while the rest of you figure out how to get our shovel wielders safely out of Brentwood.”

Pop looked at Tom Golden. “I think we ought to abide by your advice on that subject.”

“Well,” Golden said, “my first piece of advice is not to underestimate the enemy. We know they followed Mr. Holt and me out here. We’ll take for granted they guessed that we were coming to see you folks-even that we were coming with the special purpose of getting Ken under cover. In fact, they’ve probably figured out that Sandy will be in on it too. So I think we’d better assume they’ve got two cars on the job-one to stick close to Mr. Holt, and the other assigned to the boys.”

Sandy was absorbed in the map again. “What we’ve got to find, then, is some place where we can throw them off the track before we really head for Claytown.”

“If anybody can find it, you can,” Ken told him. “He knows the roads of this part of the country the way you know the streets of New York,” he added to Tom Golden.

Bert returned from his own desk. “I reached Tod all right. He’s glad to accept the offer of two strong backs -even if they’re accompanied by two weak minds.”

"Look who's talking," Sandy muttered.

"He'll be on the lookout for you tonight," Bert went on. "Have you decided yet how you're going to get there?"

"What do you think of this scheme?" Sandy asked the group.

"Instead of heading south toward Claytown, we'll head north along the main highway to New York. At Rowland's Lane, here"-his finger indicated a thin blue line-"we'll turn east. Ten miles along the lane we'll come to the intersection of Highway 119 and we can turn south on that. About twenty miles below Brentwood, on 119, we can pick up the main southbound route and be in Claytown about two and a half hours later."

Golden shook his head impatiently. "Our friends can follow you over that circuitous route just as easily as if you headed straight south in the first place."

Sandy grinned. "I'm not finished yet. Rowland's Lane is a narrow country road only wide enough for two cars to pass abreast. You'll be behind us in your car-"

"Wait a minute," Ken cut in. "Didn't you and I go out Rowland's Lane last week, to photograph the new bridge there? And isn't there a wide new stretch of road for about a quarter of a mile on either side of the bridge?"

"Yes, but that's not important," Sandy said impatiently. "The point is that most of the road is narrow. Dick and Mr. Golden will be right behind us. They'll stick so close that the shadowing car-or cars-will have to stay behind them. O.K.?" Sandy hurried on when he saw their puzzled faces. "And on our way out of town, Pop and Bert can join the procession in Bert's coupe. They can make sure that they're behind whatever car or cars are following us. Then, when we get into Rowland's Lane, Ken and I will speed up. You'll slow down." He nodded toward Tom Golden. "And before our shadows know what's happened, we'll be on our way-and they'll be boxed in between your car and Bert's. And if you happen to develop engine trouble, right in the middle of the road-well, that would hold them up long enough for us to get clear. How's that?"

Tom Golden grinned in spite of himself. "Ingenious," he admitted. "We might have a little trouble while we've got them boxed in, but I carry a gun. And besides, with witnesses right at hand"-he nodded toward Pop and Bert-"I don't really think they'd get too tough."

"I think I'll ask Andy Kane if he wouldn't like to take a little ride with us tonight, Dick," Pop said thoughtfully. "I assume you have no objection to his knowing about all this?"

"Of course not," Richard Holt said quickly. "I'd feel better if he did know. Kane's the local police chief," he added to Tom Golden.

"He'll be out of his jurisdiction on Rowland's Lane," Bert pointed

out. "But he won't mind just taking a ride. And the sight of a uniform will add to the effectiveness of your witnesses." He grinned at Holt's bodyguard.

They settled the remaining details within a few minutes.

"Wish I were going with you," Bert said when everything was planned. "Tod's a great guy. And I forgot to tell you his letter also said that the Claytown legends claim Captain Kidd buried part of his treasure in the neighborhood. Of course there's the ghost of a galloping horse that protects the area, but I'm sure you wouldn't let that stand in your way."

Sandy grinned at him. "Ah-ha! Treasure! Ken, remind me to listen for the galloping horse and do my digging right at that spot." Suddenly his face sobered. "Wow! We've got to tell Mom where we're going."

Pop took a deep breath. "Never mind," he said. "I'll explain things to her when she gets home from the club meeting." He smiled briefly and crossed his fingers. "If I can figure out a way to tell her almost the whole truth without scaring her to death."

"By the way," Dick Holt said, "it might be safer if none of you phone me at my apartment from now on. But I'll check with Global News regularly."

"The boys can keep me posted as to how they are, and I'll phone their report on to you at Global," Pop suggested.

"Thanks." The two men shook hands.

"Good luck," Pop said. "As for you two," he added to the boys, "drive carefully tonight. And see to it that you help out that young man who's good enough to take you off our hands for a couple of days."

"We'll come back covered with blisters," Sandy promised.

Bert punched his younger brother lightly on the arm and ruffled Ken's hair. "Don't cut yourself on any glass you may dig up."

The boys were packed and ready to leave the house by quarter past ten. They called Pop, and then lugged their duffel bags, two camp cots, and Sandy's ever-present case of camera equipment out to their red convertible. Tom Golden and Richard Holt, in their own car, were parked just behind it. At the last moment Sandy dashed into the garage and returned with two fishing rods.

"Just in case we do get a half-hour off a day," he explained.

Richard Holt came over to stand close beside them. "Be mighty careful tonight, boys," he said. "Don't take any risks."

"You're the one who's got to be careful, Dad," Ken said quietly. He kicked the convertible's front right tire. "I wish the next four days were over!"

"I'll take care of myself," Holt promised. "And Golden will take

care of me too, so don't worry." His hand rested on Ken's shoulder for a moment. "We'd better get going now. Pop and Bert and Andy Kane will be waiting at that comer."

"Remember," Sandy said, sliding behind the wheel, "it's about fifteen miles to the turnoff into Rowland's Lane. We'll blink our lights three times to warn you when we're there."

"Check." Tom Golden lifted his hand in farewell.

A minute later the boys were heading down the street toward the highway. Golden's sedan was fifty feet behind them.

It was 10:25 when they passed the intersection at which they could see Bert's coupe waiting.

"Golden's still right behind us," Ken reported to Sandy a moment later. "There's one car behind Golden, and then Bert's next."

Out on the open highway, headed toward New York, the four cars maintained their position. Sandy picked up a little speed and began to pass one after another of the trucks rumbling along to the city. Behind the convertible, Golden's sedan, the one strange car, and Bert's coupe all followed Sandy's lead. Then Sandy slowed down for a time, and still the little group of four cars remained in a unit. No other car cut in ahead of Bert's coupe, but the car just behind Golden stayed in that position despite several opportunities for passing.

Five miles slid by beneath their wheels.

"Guess Golden overestimated the enemy after all," Sandy said, when Ken once more reported no change in the cars following theirs. "He was so sure that there'd be two of them."

"Maybe there are," Ken pointed out. "The second one might be behind Bert's. He'd still be close enough to keep both Dad and us in sight."

"That's right," Sandy said. "But as long as it stays in that position, we don't have to worry about it. They'll both be taken care of at once when the time comes."

Another five miles were passed. The boys began to relax slightly, as the bright glow of Golden's headlights remained steady behind them. Sandy was edging out into the left lane to pass a slow-moving big truck when the blast of a horn made him pull back in line.

"Golden?" he asked Ken sharply.

"No." Ken was peering rearward. "Just somebody coming along fast in the passing lane. You'll have to wait until he gets by."

An instant later a sleek station wagon zipped past them. Ken checked once more to make sure the left lane was clear before he signaled Sandy that it was now safe to pass the truck. Then he watched Golden and the others pass the truck too. "O.K.," he reported finally. "Golden, The Shadow, and Bert's coupe are all in line again," They were nearing the top of a grade and Ken could see past the roofs

of the cars behind. "Nobody's moving around that truck on Bert's tail," he added. "Looks like you were right-The Shadow is singular."

"And he's about due for a little surprise," Sandy said. "Start looking for a big billboard advertising Hank's Hot Dog Hut. That's where we'll signal Golden for the turn."

"There it is!" Ken said an instant later.

Sandy reached for his light switch, blinked the headlights three times, and slowed down. "Watch behind." A few hundred feet farther on, he swung the convertible off the broad highway onto a narrow blacktop road.

Ken watched for the others to swing in after them. Golden's car came around the corner fifteen seconds later. Almost immediately a second pair of headlights swung in after it, and then a third. Ken continued to watch.

"That settles it," he said finally. "No more. There's just the four of us on this road."

Sandy hesitated a moment. "Well," he said then, "guess there's no use stalling around. Here we go!" He jammed down the accelerator and the red car leaped forward.

Within a few moments Golden's headlights, behind, were dwindling to pin points. They vanished entirely as Sandy coaxed the speeding car around a sharp curve.

Ken's voice was tight. "Hope they're not having any real trouble back there. Dad-Watch it!" he yelled suddenly.

His shout coincided with Sandy's desperate tug at the wheel. The convertible swerved to the left, rolling wildly, and barely scraped by the car that had loomed up out of the darkness just in front of them, parked half on the shoulder and half on the road.

Sandy fought the convertible back into control. "The crazy fool! Parking without lights and right beyond a curve. It's a wonder we didn't--"

"Step on it!"

Sandy's accelerator responded instantly to the urgency in Ken's voice. "What's up?"

"Keep moving-fast! That parked car was a station wagon-the same one that passed us a few minutes ago on the highway."

"You're sure?"

"Sure enough," Ken told him grimly. "It was here waiting for us. The driver was smart enough to get ahead of us-and smart enough to take a chance on interpreting the signal of our blinking headlights. Here it comes now!"

"Hang on!" Sandy ordered. He took the next sharp curve at a speed that set the tires to squealing, and on the straight stretch beyond, he gave the powerful engine under the red hood all the gas it could take.



The speedometer needle quivered and then moved steadily upward.

"They're gaining on us," Ken reported. He leaned closer to Sandy to make. "We need help. Where's the nearest village or gas station?"

"There's nothing at all on this road for another ten miles." Sandy bent closer over the wheel as if to add his own strength to the strength of the motor. "But we'll make it. I won't let them pass us-and they can't make us stop."

"Can't they?" Ken's face was pale in the faint glow from the dashboard. "They can shoot a hole in one of our tires and spill us all over the landscape."

## CHAPTER III

### HOOFBEATS IN THE NIGHT

"They won't do that," Sandy said. "They may want to get hold of us, but they want us alive. Your father certainly won't keep quiet if we're not." His voice lacked conviction, but he added, "So spilling us all over the landscape won't do them any good."

"It won't do us any good either. Look out!" Ken yelled. "They're trying to pass!"

The station wagon had swung out until its left wheels were skimming along the shoulder of the road, and it had crept so close that its right front fender was almost touching the left rear fender of the convertible.

Sandy pressed the accelerator harder. "No, you don't!" he muttered between clenched teeth.

Slowly the convertible drew ahead. The instant he knew he was clear, Sandy jerked the car over into the middle of the road. "Now let's see you try to pass!"

The station wagon fell back.

"But you can't hold them behind us when we reach that new section of the road," Ken pointed out. "It's too wide there."

"By then we'll have more of a lead on them," Sandy said determinedly, hunching still closer over the wheel.

The convertible's speedometer moved upward again, in tiny jerks, and the distance between the two cars continued to increase. Ken clung to the door handle to keep from being flung out of his seat.

"No side roads along here?" Ken asked.

Sandy shook his head briefly. "Nothing."

"Yes, there is!" Ken leaned toward him, still clinging to the door handle. "There's the old road-the big loop that was abandoned where part of the new stretch of road goes over the new bridge."

"Yes, I know, but-" Sandy broke off. "Maybe it's worth a try."

Another minute went by and another mile of darkness had sped behind them. Sandy managed to maintain the lead he had won, but the lead was no longer increasing.

Ken sensed that the car behind them had the power to draw abreast of them-even to pass them-at any time when the width of the road permitted. He wondered whether the driver of the station wagon knew about the new stretch of road and decided that was unlikely. It had only been open a week, and in any case Rowland's Lane was not a through highway. It probably was entirely unknown to strangers from the city.

Suddenly, in the jouncing glare of the headlights, he saw the line of demarcation where the narrow blacktop road gave way to the new broader stretch of concrete just ahead.

“Hang on!” Sandy shouted.

The moment the car behind them zoomed onto the new pavement the space between the two cars began to dwindle. The station wagon edged steadily forward, pulling slightly to the left as if completely confident of its ability to pass the convertible. Sandy edged leftward too, to cut it off. The station wagon swung to the right. Sandy, jaw clenched, countered that maneuver too. Every foot of the road was bringing the two cars closer together, and the convertible was lurching and swaying under the violence of Sandy’s handling.

The station wagon held back for a brief instant, to give itself room to get around the convertible, and then pulled forward once more. It came closer and closer to the convertible’s rear fender. Sandy edged slightly to the right, as if courteously making way for the station wagon’s swift progress. The station wagon’s radiator came abreast of the rear wheels, and then of the convertible’s rear seat.

Ken could see that there were three occupants in the other car—two men in front and one in the rear. The latter had his window open and was gesticulating wildly through it. The revolver in his hand lent emphasis to his motions.

The radiators were side by side. The gun waved close to Sandy’s head. For an instant the cars ran neck and neck.

Then suddenly Sandy slammed on his brakes. The convertible bucked, its tires grabbing at the concrete. Ken was flung forward.

“Hold fast!” Even as the station wagon swept ahead, unable to check its headlong speed, Sandy swung the convertible’s wheel to the right. The car leaped into the air as it struck the shoulder of the pavement. When it came down again its front wheels were on the old road, angling sharply off to the right.

The boys got a single glimpse of the station wagon, its stoplights blazing and its tires shrieking, before intervening trees and undergrowth cut off their view of the new paving.

The old road surface was pitted with holes, but Sandy tore along with almost no reduction in speed.

At the end of several hundred feet a barricade rose suddenly into the glare of their crazily wavering headlights.

Sandy jammed on his brakes and came to a shuddering halt just fifty feet from a huge sign that read: WARNING-BRIDGE OUT.

An instant later he had forced the car into reverse and was backing it off the road into the shelter of a great heap of earth left by a road-repair crew. He killed his lights, but left his engine idling.

“Here they come.” Ken was breathing hard.

A glow was beginning to illuminate the dense clouds of dust the convertible had raised. A moment later they could hear the other vehicle's approach at a reckless speed.

And then the station wagon was tearing past their hiding place. A split second later its wheels locked and its tires plowed channels in the loose gravel.

But the brakes had been applied too late. For a moment, through the dust-laden air, the boys could see the station wagon's headlights reflected back from the white-striped barricade. Then the headlights struck and the barricade disappeared.

Simultaneously with the sound of the crash Sandy threw the convertible into motion. He swung it around the pile of earth and headed it back the way they had come. The slowly settling dust still hid the holes in the road, and the car bounced dangerously, but Sandy kept the accelerator pressed close to the floor. They felt as if they were emerging from a nightmare when Sandy guided the front wheels once more onto the newly paved road, and turned in the direction of the southbound highway.

"Whew!" Ken wiped perspiration and dust from his face while Sandy worked his fingers to relieve the tension of their grip on the wheel. "I wonder what happened to them." Ken's voice was still shaky.

"Frankly," Sandy said, beginning to mop his own brow, "I don't much care right now. But we can find out." He was driving at a normal speed, and now he slowed the car still further and changed to his parking lights. They were approaching the new bridge. Sandy let the convertible ease to a stop just before they reached it.

They opened the car doors quietly and moved forward to look downstream, over the top of the breast-high cement wall that edged the bridge. Below them, the water of the small stream showed only as faint gleams in the darkness. But some five hundred feet away there was a patch of brilliance.

In the middle of the stream, at the spot where the old bridge had once arched over it, the station wagon now stood. It was right side up, but at a nose-up angle. Water flowed over its hubcaps and the one headlight that was working pointed crazily toward the sky. A shadowy figure, bending over the left front wheel, straightened up as the boys watched. When he spoke, his words carried clearly through the quiet night.

"Mud-deep enough to bury a battleship!" The voice was harsh with fury. "We'll need a wrecker or a derrick!" He splashed noisily back along the side of the car.

The answering bellow was equally audible. "Well, find one, you fool!"

"I wish I could take a picture of this," Sandy breathed.

"Get one yourself!" the first voice growled back. "It was your idea to go down this cow track after them. I told you it didn't go any place."

"Shut up, you two!" The third voice was more controlled than the others had been. "Concentrate on getting out of here and on getting word to the boss that we fell down on the job."

"Maybe we can pick up their trail again," the second voice suggested.

"Don't talk nonsense! They're miles away by now-and all we can tell him is that they were heading east the last time we saw them-and that's going to be no help. One of us had better start hoofing for the highway to find a phone."

"There's a map in here some place." The second voice was more subdued now. "Maybe there's a town somewhere close by."

The flicker of a flashlight showed inside the car. The man in the water splashed another few steps and peered in through the front window.

"I suppose there's nothing to keep that nosy reporter from spilling all he knows now," he said, and this time the boys could barely make out his words. "That means the boss is going to want to disappear, but quick. Well, what does the map say?"

"There's a town about three miles east of here. Tomkin's Corner."

Sandy was grinning widely a moment later as the boys got back in the convertible and rolled quietly over the bridge and on down Rowland's Lane.

"Tomkin's Corner is no town," he told Ken. "It's just what it sounds like-one general store that closed up tight about six hours ago. The nearest phone is probably about eight miles from here-at one of the highway all-night gas stations. And if they try to save time by crossing Engstrom's fields, bordering the stream back there-Wow!"

Ken looked at him. "You mean Engstrom-the man who owns the Brookdale Stock Farms?"

"That's right," Sandy told him. "He's got pedigreed bulls in those pastures that are worth thousands of dollars, and any strangers around his place are immediately carted off to the police station."

There was a moment's silence as the convertible purred quietly along the road. Simultaneously the boys turned their heads to look at each other.

"Exactly," Ken said, grinning. "There are strangers around his place right this minute. Don't you think he'd like to know about it?"

Sandy stepped on the accelerator. "I certainly do. And the quicker the better."

"Naturally," Ken said, "we won't tell him anything but the truth.

We didn't see anybody trying to make away with his prize bulls."

"Of course not," Sandy agreed. "But we just saw these men parked as close as they could get to his fields-even though they had to run into the stream to do it-and we couldn't help wondering."

They were still grinning as Sandy pulled up before an open gas station on the highway a few minutes later. Ken hurried inside.

He was out again in less than two minutes.

"Well?" Sandy asked, guiding the car back onto the highway.

"As you so neatly put it a little while ago," Ken said, " 'Wow!' I don't think he even bothered to hang up the receiver. I think he just dropped it and ran. He didn't even want to know who I was. All he cared about was finding out what those men were doing at the edge of his field."

The southbound highway was smooth and uncrowded. The convertible made good time. For long miles the boys kept up their spirits by trying to imagine what had happened when Engstrom charged angrily down upon the stream-bound station wagon. It felt good to be able to laugh after the tenseness of the earlier part of the evening, particularly when the empty highway made it clear that they were now undoubtedly free of pursuers. At times, on fairly level stretches, they could see for half a mile in both directions, and often there were no other car lights in sight in all that distance.

But finally their own sense of security, and their amusement over the Engstrom incident, were no longer enough to conceal their worry.

"I'd certainly like to know how the others made out back there, after we pulled away from Golden's car," Sandy said.

His father was in the forefront of Ken's mind. He was acutely aware that there were four dangerous days ahead for Richard Holt-and that the failure of the station-wagon trio that evening was not likely to soften the gangsters' attitude toward the Global News reporter.

Ken looked at his watch. "Dad and Bert might be back at the office by now," he said. "It's nearly midnight."

"There's a diner open up ahead," Sandy pointed out. "Let's see if we can get hold of them."

Bert was out of breath when he answered their call. He and Pop had been driving into the *Advance* parking lot when the phone rang. His report of what happened in Rowland's Lane was cheering.

"Golden swung his car across the road and stopped dead," Bert explained. "The car behind him had to stop too-there were two men in it-and so did we. Pretty soon we're all standing around in the road together. Naturally Pop and I didn't let on we knew Dick and Tom Golden, and Andy Kane played dumb too. We asked what was wrong and Golden said he didn't know -something seemed to be wrong with his steering mechanism and he stopped as soon as he could. He said

he was afraid to start up again. He tinkered under the hood for a while, and then I offered to take a look. I pretended I thought I'd found something broken, and riddled around for about ten minutes before I admitted I was wrong."

"And what were the men from the other car doing all this time?" Ken asked. He was holding the receiver so that Sandy could hear Bert too.

"Acting like innocent human beings filled with sympathy for somebody in trouble," Bert answered. "In fact, they acted so innocent they had me fooled for a while. I thought maybe we'd made a mistake. But when Golden finally decided to drive very slowly back to this end of Rowland's Lane, and stop at the repair shop there, they suddenly asked if they were on the road to New York. We told them no, so they turned around too. We waited a few minutes and then trailed along. The last we saw of them, Golden and Dick were in conference with the repair-shop mechanic, and the other two men were drinking coffee in the diner across the street. I suppose they're all on their way to New York by now."

The boys looked at each other with relief, but Ken knew that his father was still in plenty of danger.

"I take it," Bert was saying, "that you two got away without any trouble?"

"Well-practically," Sandy said.

There was loud music playing in the diner, and a laughing crowd of youngsters, apparently on their way home from a dance, in a booth nearby. The boys nodded at each other. It seemed safe to talk. Quickly Ken related what had happened, and Bert's alarm gave way to guffaws over Engstrom's reaction to the phone call.

"Great!" Bert congratulated them. "I couldn't have thought of a better trick myself." Then he sobered. "I'll keep calling Global News until I get hold of Dick," he said, "and report to him what you overheard them say.

"Now don't worry," Bert concluded. "You know Dick can take care of himself. And with Golden beside him every minute I'm sure he's going to be all right."

"Oh, sure," Ken said, trying to sound convinced.

A few minutes later they were back in the car, heading south once more. As they drove, they ate the hamburgers they'd had made up for them while they were on the phone, and listened to the radio. But Ken kept wishing he could talk to his father and assure himself that Dick Holt was all right.

Four days! Ken knew it would seem like four years. He had always thought that he would like to watch archaeologists at work. The opportunity to be in on a dig would normally be exciting to him. But

now he wondered how he could possibly even pretend an interest in the Claytown project while his mind would always be in New York with his father.

Sandy's voice broke into his thought. "Here we are."

Ken looked around. They were driving slowly through the main street of Claytown. Two grocery stores, a drugstore, a gas station, a rickety-looking building that was obviously devoted to the sale of fishing equipment and bait, and a more modern structure filled with tractors and other farm machinery seemed to comprise the town's business section.

Sandy slowed for a small cross street at the end of the single block. "That looks like it."

Just around the corner was a large white building with a wide porch across its front. A faded sign above the porch read: CLAYTOWN INN.

They left the car in a weed-grown lot at one side, picked up their bags, and walked up the porch steps to the front door.

It opened under Ken's hand. Inside, a single light hung from a cord over a deserted desk backed by cubbyholes for mail. There was no clerk in sight.

But at the foot of the broad flight of stairs stood a slight elderly man wearing mud-stained overalls. On the step above him, briskly tucking a T-shirt into a pair of faded jeans, as if he were hurrying into his clothes after just having been roused from bed, was a heavily built young man of medium height, with bristling yellow hair and the shoulders of a wrestler.

"But I'm tellin' you, Mr. Hayworth," the older man was saying urgently, "I heard 'em myself-the sound of gallopin' hoofbeats, as plain as day. I'm afraid it means you're in for trouble, young man!"



# CHAPTER IV

## GALLOPING GHOST

Gallop ing hoofbeats!

The phrase instantly recalled to Ken's mind the sound of Bert's voice, earlier that evening, saying "There's the ghost of a galloping horse that protects the area."

It would certainly help to occupy their minds for the next few difficult days, Ken found himself thinking, if Claytown boasted a real galloping ghost. It would be fun to track him down-to discover what really—

Ken brought himself back to earth.

The yellow-haired young man, who was obviously Bert's friend, Tod Hayworth, was laughing. "Clem!" he said. "What kind of nonsense are you talking? And in the middle of the night!"

Sandy let his duffle bag slide to the floor and both men at the foot of the stairs turned instantly in their direction.

"Mr. Hayworth?" Sandy began. "We're—"

"Sure! Hello!" The young man strode toward them through the gloom of the lobby and grasped first Sandy's hand and then Ken's.

Ken winced, and quickly revised his previous idea that archaeologists were dry-as-dust scientists with more brain than sinew.

"Sorry." Tod Hayworth laughed. "When you've been handling a shovel for years you sometimes don't know your own strength. You're Ken," he added. "And you're Sandy. I'd know that red Allen hair anywhere. Glad you got here all right. Bert hinted you-uh-might not make it."

"We made it all right." Sandy grinned briefly. This was not the moment to go into detail over their own affairs. "We didn't expect to find you up, though," he admitted, unconsciously glancing over Hayworth's shoulder toward the man still standing at the foot of the stairs.

"Five minutes ago I wasn't." Hayworth swung around and gestured. "Come on over here, Clem, and meet another couple of hands. This is Clem Locum," he explained to the boys, as he introduced them. "He's already signed up as our first chief assistant, and he's been busy today rounding up a couple more local men to help us out." He put an arm around Clem's shoulders. "That means there'll be seven of us on the job tomorrow morning! Boy, I can hardly wait to get going. With a crew like this we ought to know in short order whether my hunch is going to pan out or not."

Clem's deep-set eyes looked up at him wisely. "I wouldn't be too

sure about all seven of 'em turnin' up, Mr. Hayworth," he said. "If anybody else heard them gallopin' hoofbeats tonight, nobody in this town will go near your camp tomorrow."

Hayworth's glance at him was half-amused, half-exasperated.

"Clem just woke me up to tell me a crazy yarn," he explained to the boys. "He-well, you tell them, Clem. I can't believe I heard you correctly. I must have been still asleep."

"You heard me all right, Mr. Hayworth. You just--"

"It's Tod-not Mr. Hayworth," the young archaeologist interrupted him. "And it's Dan-not Mr. Galen. That goes for you too," he added to the boys. "O.K., Clem, go ahead. And this time I'll try to take you seriously." But his eyes were still twinkling beneath the yellow thatch.

Clem spoke defensively, rubbing the back of his hand across his mouth first and then on his faded overalls.

"Well," he said, "I was down the creek in my rowboat tonight, as usual, lookin' for eels. Not with the big light and the spear, though-just with bait and a drop line. Everythin' was real quiet. No frogs or night birds soundin'. I was just driftin' past that marshy point, right this side of your camp, when I heard it. It was as loud and plain as day-the sound of a horse gallopin'!"

"That's what I thought you said before," Tod Hayworth told him. "But what I don't understand is the reason for all the excitement. Is there a law around here against going horseback riding? Or against leaving a horse out in a pasture at night?"

Clem Locum's glance at him was almost pitying. "There's no pasture anywheres around there, young man. And nobody could ride a horse over that marsh-you know that yourself. No, sir, I'm tellin' you these were the hoofbeats that everybody around here calls the ghost of the gallopin' horse. Now I'm not sayin' I believe in ghosts myself, because I don't. But I'm tellin' you I did hear those hoofbeats and I know they mean trouble. They meant trouble in the old days, and I'm willin' to bet they will again."

The boys glanced at each other and then at Tod Hayworth. The old man's sincerity was unmistakable, and he had clearly come to the inn to warn Hayworth. But of what?

Hayworth ran a hand through his yellow stubble. "Let's sit down for a minute," he said, drawing them all with him toward a semicircle of battered wicker chairs near the front windows. "Now look, Clem," he went on, when they were seated, "I know you're not kidding me. You heard hoofbeats and you say it can't have been a real horse. I'll take your word for that-at least I know how marshy the point is. I'd heard vaguely about the local ghost legend, when I made my preliminary visit down here this spring-but you say you don't believe in ghosts. So what do you think made the sound? And why does it

mean trouble?"

Clem hitched up the knees of his overalls and sat forward on his chair. "Maybe you don't know the whole legend, as you call it. Years ago-long before my time-folks used to say there was a gallopin' horse that protected some treasure Captain Kidd was supposed to have buried along the creek. Lots of coast towns have stories like that and in my opinion none of 'em mean anythin'. Captain Kidd wasn't even in these parts, to my knowledge-let alone havin' buried gold hereabouts. But there was this story, see? And some folks believed it."

"I understand. Go ahead." Hayworth's scientific mind was now fastened on the problem, and the boys were listening intently too. Clem's earnestness demanded attention.

"Then," Clem continued, "along in prohibition days that ghost began to gallop real often. I heard it myself then; that is, I heard the sound folks said was the ghost. I knew different. You see, this creek of ours was a favorite spot for rumrunners in those days-fellows who were bringin' liquor into the country illegally while there was a law against makin' it here or importin' it. Ships from the Caribbean islands and such places used to come up along the coast here, and these rumrunners went out to them in little boats and picked up crates of the stuff."

Clem's voice dropped a notch. "Now these fellows were real gangsters, you understand-not local people from Claytown. Their headquarters was in Philadelphia or New York or somewheres, and they just used the creek because it was handy. And naturally they didn't want local folks snoopin' into what they were doin'. So the ghost began to gallop every once in a while. I don't know how they managed the sound, but I do know it worked. Lots of folks around here are superstitious, and they wouldn't go near the place when they thought the ghost was about."

A faint grin creased his already lined features. "And even those of us who aren't superstitious," Clem said, "learned it was a good idea to stay away from the creek then. We weren't afraid of a ghost, but we weren't such fools as not to be afraid of the rumrunners. They carried guns and they didn't mind usin' 'em."

Clem waited a moment, for his last words to sink in, and then he put a gnarled hand on each knee and added solemnly, "So what I say is that this gallopin' sound tonight means the rumrunners are back in the creek again. And they won't be wantin' you or anybody else to get in their way down there."

Hayworth stared at him unbelievably for a moment and then burst out laughing. "Rumrunners! Why, Clem, they're an extinct race-or practically, anyway."

There was a glint in Sandy's eye. "Maybe it's the ghosts of the

rumrunners,” he suggested.

Tod grinned at him delightedly. “That’s an idea! Ghost rumrunners riding around on their old ghost horse!”

Clem’s tight mouth showed his disappointment and his disapproval.

As a gesture of apology toward him, Ken said, “Well, I suppose it might be the same men back again-not running rum this time, but trying to smuggle something else.” It sounded unlikely, even as he said it, and he wasn’t surprised that Hayworth cocked a skeptical eyebrow at him and Sandy grinned in open disbelief.

“I’ll tell you what, Clem,” Hayworth said, serious again because he too realized the old man was both hurt and annoyed, “the first thing in the morning I’ll ask Dan if he heard anything. And if he did, we’ll-“

“Neither of you could have heard the sound up here,” Clem broke in.

“But Dan’s spending the night down at the dig. Didn’t you know?” Hayworth answered his own question with a quick shake of the head. “No, of course, you didn’t. He made up his mind to do it after you left. He said one of us ought to be on hand there, since our equipment represents practically our entire worldly goods. And Dan insisted on being the one, because he’d slept in the car during our drive here last night. Anyway, the first thing in the morning we’ll ask Dan if he heard anything and-” He interrupted himself because Clem Locum was getting to his feet.

“I wish I’d known that,” the little man said soberly. “I’d have gone ashore to make certain he was all right. As it was, I”-once more he rubbed the back of his hand across his mouth-“well, I just started up my motor and hightailed it back to the village. I didn’t reckon anybody’d be botherin’ your equipment and I figured the smart thing was to get out of there. I know you don’t take me seriously, Mr. Hayworth, but I know for certain I heard the same gallopin’ sound I used to hear down there, and I don’t like it. No, sir. And I sure wish now that I’d gone ashore and had a look around.”

Tod Hayworth was on his feet too, and he put his powerful arm around the little man’s shoulders. “You’re a good friend, Clem. I tell you what: I’ll get the jeep out and we’ll drive down to the dig right now. Or you go on home and I’ll go down. Will that satisfy you?”

His glance at the boys, over Clem’s head, was an apology for deserting them to humor Clem’s whim.

“Oh, no, I’ll come along,” Clem was saying with dignity. He was clearly relieved at Hayworth’s changed attitude, but just as clearly not overjoyed at the prospect of visiting the dig at that hour.

Ken and Sandy exchanged a quick look. They both knew that the evening had left them too keyed up for sleep. Ken, aware that he

would start a fruitless period of worry over his father the moment he was alone with his thoughts, was the first to nod. Sandy nodded back.

“Do you mind if we come along, Tod?” Ken asked.

A few minutes later Tod was turning right off the main street of Claytown, and guiding the jeep along a sandy unpaved road. It was scarcely more than a lane and it seemed to wander haphazardly over the flat terrain.

“This road more or less parallels the creek,” Tod explained over his shoulder, as if in a deliberate effort to make this night ride seem ordinary and matter of fact. “It stays just far enough inland to be on solid ground. There’s a lot of marsh around here, of course. And where it isn’t real marsh it’s mostly just flat sand. Not very interesting country. The highest ground around here is all of fifty feet above sea level—a kind of mound on the inland end of that point just above our dig. It’s called a hill around here, but I’ve been climbing the Andes a little too recently to be impressed by it.”

Clem, beside him, spoke dryly. “And maybe you had so many adventures with bandits in those Andes that you aren’t impressed by the idea of American gangsters, either.”

Tod Hayworth laughed. “A good hit, Clem! Guess that did sound like bragging. No, there wasn’t a single bandit in the Andes, so far as we saw. The whole expedition fell rather flat, for that matter. Just a lot of hard work and nothing very spectacular in the way of results.” He straightened his broad shoulders. “If Dan and I don’t have better luck here, we’re going to have to look for a job where we can get paid for ditch-digging.” The words were light but there was grim determination in his voice.

Ken remembered what Hayworth had said in his letter to Bert—that this was his first venture on his own, and how important it was to him. “Who owns all this land around here?” he asked. “Did you have to get permission for your dig?”

“Getting permission was no problem,” Tod said. “Most of the land along this side of the creek, from the bay nearly back to Claytown, has been owned for a century or so by a wealthy old Philadelphia family named Vandervliet. They used to use it as a duck-shooting preserve, but apparently the Vandervliets are sportsmen no longer, because they told me they never use it any more. Which is a break for us, of course. They’re perfectly willing to let us dig the place up.

“The only other person we have to worry about,” he added, “is another wealthy Philadelphian named Arthur Barnes. He bought a fifty-acre tract from the Vandervliets about fifteen years ago—including half of that hill I mentioned—and built a fishing and hunting lodge on it. It’s supposed to stand on the foundations of an older house that may have been pre-Revolutionary, so I’d like to take a look at it while

we're here. But Barnes has been deep-sea fishing down South somewhere, and I haven't been able to see him yet."

"He's likely to turn up out here any day," Clem told him. "He comes and goes whenever the mood strikes him."

Tod slowed the jeep down and peered sharply ahead into the faint mist that lay on the ground. Then suddenly he swerved to the right. The jeep's front wheels angled sharply upward and the little car climbed a shallow bank. At the top it was on level ground again. The headlights showed a flat sandy expanse sparsely overgrown with a kind of tall spiky grass. Faint tracks stretched out in front of them and Hayworth guided the car along them.

When a squarish shape loomed out of the darkness ahead, Hayworth drew abreast of it and stopped.

"The trailer we carry our equipment in," he said.

The silence was sudden and profound when the car's motor died.

Hayworth's voice sounded loud as he said, "Dan ought to show himself any second. He's a light sleeper, which is another reason he insisted on being the one to stay here tonight. I'm a little harder to rouse in case of an emergency-aren't I, Clem?"

Clem's head was cocked in a listening attitude. Instinctively the others, glancing at him, also bent their heads slightly.

No sound broke the quiet of the night.

Before any of the others could speak, Clem said, "Well, it's gone now, all right."

They didn't ask what he meant. And after a look at his face, pale in the faint reflected glow of the headlights, they didn't laugh because Clem's galloping ghost was no longer audible.

Instead, Hayworth climbed out of the jeep and moved a few steps forward. "Dan!" he called. "Dan! You awake?"

There was no answer for a moment. And then a curiously uncertain voice, not far away, said, "Tod? That you?" Almost simultaneously with the words a figure appeared in the far reaches of the headlights' beam. It was a man a little taller than Hayworth, but not quite so heavy. A hand was raised to his dark hair and he was moving toward them at an uneven limping gait.

"Dan!" Hayworth hurried to meet him. "You're hurt!" ; The others, scrambling out of the jeep, followed him. s "What happened to you?" Tod Hayworth demanded.

Dan Galen grinned lopsidedly. "The craziest fool stunt I ever pulled." He saw the others then, said "Hi, Clem," and looked curiously at the boys.

"Bert Allen's brother, Sandy," Hayworth explained hastily. "And his friend Ken Holt. They're going to give us a hand for a couple of days, Dan. I'll explain it all later. Now tell me what happened to you?"

Dan grinned again, at the boys this time. "Young archaeologist comes a cropper," he said. "Fine way to meet a couple of welcome assistants, I must say. What are you all doing down here, anyway?"

"Dan, for Pete's sake, answer my question?" Tod's voice was menacing.

Dan shrugged. "Well, I suppose I might as well admit it now as later. Something woke me up a while ago. Can't tell you what it was exactly. Sounded sort of like -well, never mind. The point is I woke up. While I was still coming to I heard the sound of an outboard motor starting up out in the creek."

The others glanced at Clem quickly, but nobody interrupted.

"I sat up in my sleeping bag for a minute," Dan went on. "And then I heard what I thought were voices. I decided you couldn't sleep and had come down to talk for a while." Dan's mouth quirked upward as he looked at his associate. "I should have known *that* wasn't likely. Anyhow, I got up and walked toward the sound. It was right about here, I guess, that I saw a flashlight, and I called out. Called your name, as I remember. Nobody answered-and the flashlight went out."

Dan paused a moment and the others waited impatiently. "So I called out again," Dan said finally. "I guess I sounded kind of sore. I thought maybe you were playing a trick on me and I didn't think it was very funny. So I yelled something like 'What do you think you're doing?' and started to run toward the spot where I'd seen the flashlight. It came on again then, and I could see that there were two men-not far from the packing case there. But now they were running away. So I ran after them." Once more he paused and then concluded with a sheepish grin, "And I tripped on a length of rope we'd left lying around-and knocked myself out. Hit my head on the packing case. And twisted my ankle when I fell."

"Knocked *yourself* out!" Tod let the words out in a gust of relief. He stifled an involuntary grin. "Sorry, Dan, I don't really think it's funny. The men you saw probably were out digging for bait, or something, and you probably scared them to death. But seeing you limping-and after listening to Clem tonight-I was prepared for something a little more melodramatic."

Dan looked ready to share the joke. "Why? What was Clem-?"

Clem's suddenly rifted hand silenced him.

"Listen!" Clem said softly.

It was a rhythmic sound-a dull, swift series of thuds. It was unmistakably the sound of a horse's hoofs pounding at a gallop, somewhere not far away. In the faint damp night breeze the ghostly noise grew louder, then softer, then louder again.

Clem's hand was still rigid, as if he had forgotten how to move.

Dan's voice was a whisper. "Then I wasn't dreaming," he

murmured. "It was the sound of a galloping horse that woke me up!"

The sound of the galloping hoofs lasted for several minutes, rising and falling, growing louder and then softer and then louder again. It was impossible to tell if the sound moved closer to them and then retreated, or if it was always at the same distance and grew louder or softer depending on the lift and fall of the salty breeze that came in from the bay.

And then the pounding gallop died to a whisper once more and was gone.

For long seconds afterward they all continued to stand quiet, still listening.

Clem cleared his throat suddenly and they all looked at him. But he didn't speak. He just looked back at them, as if awaiting their verdict.

"Well," Tod said finally, "it's an effective performance, all right. Ghostly or otherwise."

Dan grinned his lopsided grin. "You should hear it when you're all alone-when you've just been waked out of a sound sleep and your imagination is going full blast." He gave himself a vigorous shake. But the movement made him hold his hand to his head again. "I was beginning to take a look around," he added, "after I'd picked myself up off the ground. I couldn't see any evidence of anybody having tampered with our stuff, but I suppose we might as well finish the inspection now that we're all here."

He flicked on his flashlight-they had all been standing in the dark-and in the sudden glow he seemed to remember something.

"But first," Dan said, "tell me why you all came out here and what Clem was being melodramatic about." He turned to the boys. "And how you two got pulled into our backbreaking project here."

"We didn't get pulled in," Ken assured him. "Tod agreed to take us in out of the kindness of his heart."

Tod answered all of Dan's questions, briefly and to the point. After a questioning look at the boys, and their answering nod, he explained how Bert had phoned him that evening, and why the boys needed an out-of-the-way place to stay for a while. Then he went on and recounted how Clem had aroused him from sleep with his tale of the galloping horse just a few moments before the boys arrived.

"I must admit I was pampering Clem when I agreed to come down here," Tod finished. "But I wouldn't have missed the ghost for anything, though I still can't accept Clem's explanation that it means danger to anybody who comes near the creek. I think it's more likely some kids' trick. They may have heard that it scared people years ago, and are trying their hand at it just for fun."

Clem snorted.



“You don’t think that’s what it is, do you, Clem?” Dan asked. “No, I can see you don’t. Well, let’s finish this inspection at any rate. We can discuss the philosophical aspects of ghosts-and rumrunners-afterward.”

At his gesture they all followed him to a tumbled heap of equipment nearby. Dan rummaged in it and came up with several flashlights, distributing one to each. Under his direction they moved out from the camp site, as if they were following the spokes of a wheel. Their lights made a flashing pattern in the darkness.

Ken soon found himself at the edge of the creek-a broad, shallow body of water moving slowly toward the sea on an ebb tide. He flicked his light over the surface, alive here and there with dipping insects and the occasional leap of a tiny fish, and then he turned and made his way back.

None of them had seen anything strange or unusual. And there were no further sounds of the galloping hoofs.

Sandy yawned hugely as they met once more near the packing case. It set off a small epidemic of yawns that caught Ken and both their hosts. Only Clem seemed immune.

“Let’s call it a night,” Tod said firmly. “Tomorrow morning we’ll take another look around-and we’ll also put our heads together and try to make sense out of the whole business.” He turned to Clem. “You don’t really think there’s any point in our worrying about it any more tonight, do you, Clem?”

Clem shrugged. “I couldn’t say. But now that I know Mr. Galen’s safe-Dan, I mean-why, I don’t know as I can think of anythin’ more we can do now.”

There was a brief argument then. Dan wanted Tod to go back to the inn and sleep comfortably for what was left of the night. Tod thought Dan ought to go to the inn and leave him on guard. “How can I be sure you won’t knock yourself out again?” Tod demanded.

It was finally settled that both Tod and Dan would stay at the dig. Sandy drove the jeep back to the village, with Ken and Clem crowded in beside him on the front seat. They dropped Clem at his house with a sleepy “See you in the morning,” and were soon parking the jeep alongside their own red convertible. Behind the desk of the inn they found the key to their room where Tod had told them it would be hanging, and a few minutes later they were climbing wearily into bed.

Ken was still convinced that he wouldn’t be able to sleep. Determinedly he kept his mind away from Richard Holt by saying “What do you make of it, anyhow? Why would somebody deliberately put new life into an old ghost story like that? Could they be trying to scare Tod and Dan away from that place or ...”

His voice drifted off as sleep unexpectedly overcame him. But

Sandy didn't notice. He was already snoring.

They woke after eight in the morning and hurried into their clothes. Tod had told them breakfast would be ready at the dig by eight thirty. Ken was tempted to try to call his father before they left the village, but he knew Richard Holt wouldn't be at the Global News office at that hour, and he had promised not to call him at his apartment. They ran downstairs and took off, Sandy in the jeep and Ken following in the convertible. Clem had told them that he would go down the creek in his boat-his customary and favorite mode of travel. He was to bring with him the other two Claytown men who had agreed to go to work for the archaeologists.

It was easy to find the road they had followed the night before. They bumped across the final stretch of almost invisible track and pulled up alongside the trailer. The smell of coffee led them to a battered pot bubbling on a small portable stove set up on the ground. But there were not five men gathered around the makeshift breakfast table. There were only three.

Apparently Clem was in the middle of explaining why he had arrived alone.

"So, of course, I told them there was no such a thing as a real ghost horse," he said, nodding a silent greeting to the boys without interrupting his words. "And they said they didn't care whether there was or not. They were goin' to stay away from the creek as long as that horse was gallopin' around here. I couldn't budge 'em."

Tod and Dan looked at each other. They attempted a cheerful greeting to the boys, but their minds were clearly preoccupied.

"Had they heard the horse themselves last night, Clem, or did you mention it to them?" Tod asked.

Clem's eyes flashed anger for a moment. "Me? I wouldn't do a thing like that. I know how much it means to you two to get goin' down here."

"Sorry, Clem," Tod murmured.

"That's all right," Clem assured him. "I can see how you might think I did it. Nope. Their story is that they went into the all-night diner right at the corner of our main street and the highway, to get themselves an early cup of coffee, and that they heard about it there. So they went right back home and wouldn't budge when I went for 'em."

"In the diner?" Dan looked puzzled. He handed brimming coffee cups to Ken and Sandy and pointed to a platter of eggs he had just fried. "How would word get there, I wonder?"

Clem shook his head. "I wouldn't know. Couldn't hear it that far, that I'm sure of." He swallowed coffee thoughtfully. "Tell you what, though," he went on, "I'd like to run back into the village after

breakfast and see what I can find out-if you don't mind my takin' the time. Might give us some kind of a lead, maybe."

Tod and Dan both nodded.

"I wish you'd do that," Dan said. "Maybe you'll learn something that we can use to persuade the Wilkins brothers to come to work after all."

Tod smiled at Ken and Sandy. "I really didn't mean to let you two wield shovels while you're here, no matter what I said to Bert," he told them. "But it sure would be helpful now if you could give us a hand. We had our hearts set on getting the camp set up today, but without the Wilkins I don't see how we'll ever manage it. Even though Dan's head and ankle seem to be in pretty good shape."

"Sure we'll help," Sandy said quickly, and Ken nodded agreement. "For a cook like this," Sandy added, reaching for another egg, "I'd be more than glad to do a little digging or anything else on your schedule."

Dan saluted his thanks.

Tod looked more cheerful. "Just wait until he's really got himself organized," he told the boys. "He's the best camp cook in the Western Hemisphere."

Clem got to his feet and found a place for his empty cup on the top of a crate. "I might as well get along," he said. "The sooner I go, the sooner I can be back. Takes me about twenty-five minutes to get into town, anyway, by boat."

"Do you want to take the jeep instead, Clem?" Tod asked.

"No, thanks." Clem smiled. "There's not much I don't know about boats, but cars are somethin' else again."

Ken opened his mouth to offer to drive him in, and then realized that he could probably be more help if he stayed at the camp.

Clem grinned his farewell, and moved off with the stride that seemed so leisurely but that covered the ground with remarkable speed.

Tod looked after him. "We were lucky to find him."

"We sure were," Dan agreed. "He's already made himself responsible for us-even to the extent of feeling guilty because the men he tried to hire for us didn't turn up today." He tilted the almost empty coffeepot over his cup. "That was a strange business last night," he said thoughtfully.

"I still think," Tod said, "that the men you saw were local people out looking for bait."

"Could you see how they were dressed?" Ken asked Dan. "If Clem's a good example, the people who live around here-the fishermen, anyway-seem to wear overalls and boots."

Dan looked at him sharply for a moment and then half-closed his

eyes. "I'm trying to remember," he said. "I only saw them for a minute, but yes, I'm sure of it. They were both in dark trousers and jackets-looked like business suits."

Tod made no effort to hide his skepticism. "How can you be sure by the light of a flash in the middle of a dark field? Couldn't it have been dark jeans, maybe, and some kind of a sport jacket or windbreaker?"

"I suppose it could have been," Dan admitted. "But even if we ignore my visitors altogether, what do you really think about the galloping horse?"

Tod came up from the ground in one easy motion. "I don't mind discussing our ghost," he said, "but let's work at the same time-as soon as we get cleaned up here."

"We'll do that," Sandy offered, as he and Ken also got to their feet. "Do we wash the dishes in creek water?"

Dan looked at him in mock horror. "Of course not! How were you brought up? The well's right over there -though you have to pump by hand."

"A well?" Ken was surprised.

"Sure. We got it fixed up yesterday afternoon after we arrived," Dan told him. And at Ken's continued look of amazement he added, "That's an easy job around here. We brought a well point with us-a piece of perforated pipe with a point on the end. Drove it in with a couple of hammer blows and added one more length of pipe to the top and then rigged up the pump. In this flat sandy country around here there's fresh water just about four feet below the surface."

"Pretty slick," Sandy commented. "Where I come from a well has to be dug through rock. Well, come on, Ken."

Tod grinned. "We won't try to stop you," he said. "In the meantime, Dan and I will finish unloading our trailer and see if we can locate the tent stakes."

The boys made their way between the crates and the neatly rolled sleeping bags to the pump, each with a pile of dishes in his hands. The sun had already burned off the morning mist and there was a clean sparkle and a salty freshness to the air. Beyond the sandy little stretch of beach, some two hundred feet away, the creek reflected the blue of the sky. And on every side, except for the little rise topping the spit to their right, the brown and green of half-dried sand grass rippled faintly like fields of wheat on a Midwestern plain. The only thing that broke the level surface was a low growth of scrub near the spot where the archaeologists had piled their supplies.

Dan lifted a carton of canned goods from the small trailer with an ease that suggested his strength was a match for Tod's.

"As I was saying," he reminded them, "what do you really think

about the galloping horse?" He looked over at Tod, whose arms were loaded with the heavy canvas of a sizable tent. "And if you're going to tell me again you think it was a kids' trick, tell me how they worked it."

Tod dumped the canvas off to one side, out of the way. "Simple," he said. "Like this." And he began to take quick steps in one spot, lifting his feet and bringing them down in the rhythm of a gallop.

They all looked up to watch him for a moment, and then grinned. The sound Tod was trying to make was deadened almost completely by the sand.

Tod gave up. "All right," he said. "I see your point."

A moment later he had another idea. "But you could produce the sound we heard last night with a drum, or by beating a couple of sticks on a hard surface. And you could make it fade and swell the way we heard it too."

Ken hesitated, the dish towel in one hand and a plate in the other, and then asked the question that had first suggested itself to him the night before. "But why would anybody want to make the sound?" he asked. "It's hard to believe it was kids, in the middle of the night like that. And I gather you don't agree with Clem that the rumrunners are back in the neighborhood."

"It sounds pretty unlikely to me," Dan admitted. "And yet, if that sound was once used to scare people away from the creek here, I suppose we've got to consider the possibility that it's being used for the same purpose again."

"And it was heard for the first time in years when you two turned up here," Ken pointed out. "Have you thought that the purpose of it may be to scare you away-or your workmen, at least?"

Tod and Dan both stared at him.

"But what would be the point?" Tod demanded. "We're not doing anybody any harm. The Vandervliets, as I told you, are perfectly willing to let us dig here. And we're not getting in anybody else's way."

"Could another archaeologist want to drive you away from here, so he could find your glasshouse himself?" Sandy asked.

Tod laughed. "Of course not. Archaeologists aren't cutthroats."

"I sometimes think Humphreys has tendencies in that direction," Dan said, only half-seriously. "He's a rival of ours," he explained to the boys. "Tried to get invited along on that Andes expedition, and was sore at us when we were chosen and he wasn't. He's been nosing around ever since we got back, trying to find out what we're up to now."

"Humphreys is no archaeologist," Tod said scornfully. "He's too lazy to figure out some likely dig site for himself, but he's determined

to crash in on somebody else's success." He looked seriously at Dan. "You don't suppose Humphreys really would stoop to a trick like this, do you?"

"Do you know where he is now?" Ken asked.

Tod hefted a hammer in his hand. "No, we don't. We had a letter from him just before we came down here, saying he was going off on an expedition, but not saying where. But, so far as we know, he hasn't heard a word about this Claytown scheme of ours."

"But you're not sure that he couldn't have found out?"

"No, not sure," Dan agreed. Then he looked at the boys. "You two can think up more unpleasant possibilities in five minutes than I could in five years."

Ken grinned. "We learned young," he said, "about some of the more unscrupulous members of the human race."

"And we had a brand-new lesson just last night," Sandy added.

"Say, that's right!" Tod exclaimed. "What with all the excitement around here we never did hear about your trip down. I gather everything went all right?"

"Not quite all right," Sandy admitted. And as he and Ken finished up the dishes and stored them away they related the events that had taken place in Rowland's Lane.

The expression on the faces of their listeners showed their amazement.

"But you're sure you finally got clear away?" Dan asked.

"Positive," Ken told him. "Nobody could have followed us on that empty highway without our knowing it."

Tod shook his head. "And you walked into the inn as cool as cucumbers, and listened to Clem's yarn as if it were the most exciting thing you'd ever heard!"

"That was nothing," Sandy said airily. "We're practically professional detectives. Didn't you know?"

Tod nodded slowly. "Yes. Bert's occasionally mentioned stuff about you in his letters, but I'm afraid I didn't give it the attention it deserved."

"Well," Dan said, "any detecting you want to do about our mysterious galloping horse would be just fine with us. Figure out an explanation that will calm the Wilkins brothers, and we'll be in your debt for life."

"We'll put our skilled minds to it," Sandy assured him.

"Ghosts aren't exactly in our line," Ken said, "*but* we-" He broke off at the sound of a boat's motor. "Here's Clem. Maybe he'll have a clue right now."

They were all waiting on the tiny beach as Clem cut his motor and drifted ashore.

But Clem's report was of little help. He had caught the night man of the diner just as he was going off duty, and the man had told him how he had heard of the galloping horse. Two strangers who had stopped in for coffee about three o'clock had asked him about the sound, apparently out of idle curiosity. When the diner man had prodded them on the subject, they told him only that they'd turned onto a side road by mistake-apparently the road that led from Claytown out to the dig-and had heard the sound when they realized that they were lost and had stopped to turn around. The diner man, of course, had been very much excited about the news and had passed it on to the Wilkins brothers when they turned up.

"Not very enlightening, is it?" Tod said.

While Clem was speaking, Ken had absent-mindedly scooped out of the water a crumpled cigarette pack that had come floating by on the outgoing current. Suddenly he focused his gaze on it.

"That's funny," he said. "This thing has a New York tax stamp. And it must have been thrown in the water ; very recently-it's not even soaked through yet. Did you pass any strangers on your trip from the village, Clem?"

"Not a one," Clem said. "Didn't see a soul, in fact."

"How fast does the current run along here?" Ken asked, while Dan and Tod eyed him curiously.

"About two miles an hour, I'd reckon," Clem said.

"Then this pack must have floated down from somewhere not more than half a mile upstream. This paper hasn't been in the water for more than fifteen minutes. But you didn't see anybody?"

Clem shook his head. "Of course somebody could have been hidin' in the grass, but he'd have had to lie flat."

"Somebody who's been in New York recently and who, apparently, doesn't want to be seen," Ken said slowly.

Dan's dark brows pulled together. "You're completely sure you two weren't followed down here last night?"

Ken and Sandy both repeated their conviction that that would have been impossible.

"And nobody could have known where we were heading," Ken added. "We didn't know ourselves until a few minutes before we left."

He looked down at the crumpled cigarette package. "But I'm not nearly so sure," he said, "that somebody isn't in the neighborhood with the idea of keeping an eye on your dig."

Tod's eyes narrowed. He swung his head around to look northward toward the humpbacked spit of land that forced the creek to take a sharp bend. "Half a mile," he said softly, as if he were thinking out loud. "That would be around that curve on the far side of the spit." His big hand closed into a fist. "If someone's spying on us," he said, "I

want to know about it. I'd like to ask him a question or two-whoever he is."



## CHAPTER VI

### SETTING UP CAMP

Before any of the others could reply to Tod's determined words he was striding away along the beach toward the outthrust spit.

"Wait a minute, Tod," Ken said quickly.

"Take it easy, will you?" Dan urged. "We'll all go."

"Come on then." Tod didn't break his stride.

"But, Tod," Ken called quietly, "if there's somebody over there who doesn't want to be seen, you won't find him that way." When Tod reluctantly turned around and waited, Ken hurried on. "If we all go tearing over that hill-or even if just you go-he can get out to the road and be away without our knowing it."

"I guess that's right," Tod agreed, coming back several paces to meet the others. "Well, we'd better divide up then. Clem, if you'd take your boat and go around the spit, you'd know if somebody tried to get away along the shore." He waited for Clem's nod. "And, Dan, you might take the jeep and drive back to the road. Turn up toward Barnes' place and see if you notice any car tracks leading into his lane. Park the jeep right across the foot of the lane if you do. That'll prevent anybody from getting away by that route. The rest of us"-he looked at Ken and Sandy-"will make the frontal approach. O.K.?"

They didn't bother to answer him. Clem was already making for his boat, and Dan was heading for the jeep at a fast lope. Ken and Sandy and Tod started directly for the hump of land. They could hear the boat motor before they had covered a hundred feet, and the jeep motor a few seconds later.

Tod led them along the shore line until they reached the point where the spit was attached to the mainland, as a thumb is attached to the palm of a hand. There he left the water and headed directly up the grass-grown slope toward the crest of the little hill. At the top of the ridge they found themselves facing a barbed-wire fence that divided the finger of land lengthwise.

"This is Barnes' fence," Tod explained.

Instinctively they all stopped there, to take advantage of the height on which they stood. Looking down past the slope in front of them, they could see Barnes' lodge about a thousand feet away. A low rambling building of weathered gray shingle, it stood near the shore not far beyond the spot where the creek straightened out after its curving detour around the spit. In the sparse vegetation that surrounded it they could make out the hundred-foot-long wooden walk that ran from the lodge to a dock and boathouse. There was no

sign of life on the property, and no motion except the constant rustle of the stiff grasses.

“Here comes Clem,” Tod said.

The little skiff was just nosing around the point of the spit and starting to edge along its north shore. Clem had his motor cut down low and he was directing his prow in and out of each tiny bay made by the ragged shore line. The intentness of his posture indicated that he was searching carefully for any sign of an alien figure along the beach or among the grasses of the slope that rose above it.

They waited until he had completed his survey and nosed his craft onto the beach at the point where the spit widened again into the mainland. The spit was so narrow there, at its base, that when Clem stepped out onto the beach he was only a few hundred feet below them.

“Any luck?” Tod called down quietly.

Clem looked up and saw them. “Not a bit. But I’ll walk back a way along the beach and take another look.”

Ken, following the fence toward the tip of the spit, was paralleling Clem’s course. Tod and Sandy came along behind him.

Clem’s shout and Ken’s discovery occurred almost simultaneously.

“Somebody’s been here recently!” Ken said, stopping dead, just as Clem yelled up: “Found some tracks!”

“Stay there, Clem! We’ll be right down!” Tod called, and then he hurried forward to join Ken.

All three of them stood looking down at the circle of trampled grass Ken had discovered. The patches of bare sand among the growth showed several clearly marked depressions.

While they were still staring at it they realized that Clem was coming up the slope directly toward them. They all swung around to watch him.

“I’m followin’ those tracks,” Clem explained, as he drew nearer. “They come straight up from the shore this way. Looks like they’re headin’ right for the spot where you’re standin’.”

“I think you’re right, Clem,” Ken said. “I think this is exactly where they end.” He was looking intently at the trampled space. “I’ve got an idea,” he said suddenly.

He stepped forward carefully and then dropped flat on the ground. When he fitted his elbows into two of the more clearly marked hollows, his arms were at a comfortable angle for propping his head on his hands.

“Somebody could have been lying here just like this,” Ken said slowly. Then he took his fists from under his chin and held his cupped hands around his eyes. “And if they had a pair of binoculars, held like this,” he went on, “they could see every movement we’ve made down

at the camp site. There's a clear path of sight right through the grass and between those two scrubby bushes part way down the slope."

"So that's what somebody's been doing!" Tod said angrily.

"You must be right, Ken!" Sandy sounded excited. "Look! Just about four inches back of the spot where your toes are dug in, there's another hollow. Looks as if somebody just a few inches taller than you was lying there-just the way you're lying."

Clem had come up in time to hear the end of the reconstruction.

"This is where that set of tracks come, all right," he said, his eyes bright in his seamed face.

Ken had rolled sideways a little, supporting his weight on his left elbow, and now he brought his right hand back preparatory to rising. Just before he put the palm of that hand flat on the ground, Sandy shouted:

"Hold it!" The big redhead leaped forward and grabbed Ken's right wrist. "Look at that!" He held back a clump of the coarse grass so that the others could see the spot Ken's hand had almost landed on. "If that's not a handprint," Sandy said, "I'll eat beach grass for supper tonight."

"Hand print?" Tod stared disbelievingly. "Doesn't look like that to me."

Ken, balanced on one elbow, peered at the faint depression. "If the person who was lying here started to get up, just as I did then, that's right where he'd press his hand down. But he'd have certainly put his whole hand down, if he was going to rest his weight on it. But this looks more like just the two outside fingers and the thumb and the palm. In fact, I'm not sure it's a print at all, Sandy."

"It could be the print of a man who has a couple of fingers missing," Sandy pointed out.

Ken grinned at him. "I won't argue with you. We've run into stranger things than that."

Tod, clearly unimpressed with Sandy's deduction, was growing impatient. "Well, if we've seen all there is to see here, how about following those tracks in the other direction? Did they start right at the water's edge, Clem?"

"Seemed so to me. As if somebody'd come up in a boat and walked ashore," Clem told him.

"Let's take a look." Tod vaulted Barnes' fence and started down the slope.

The others followed, with Clem pointing out the gouges and indefinite tracks indicating that at least one person had climbed the sandy hill at that point. Near the water's edge there was a circle of confused marks.

"Here's where I first saw them," Clem said.

Ken was glancing about him. "Somebody stood here for a while," Ken said. "Maybe he was lighting the last cigarette in his package and then threw the empty wrapper into the water." His eyes traveled along the beach away from the point. "But look! The ground right behind this spot is pebbly. It wouldn't take prints. Maybe we'll find something on the far side of this patch."

The pebble stretch of beach lasted just beyond the spot where Clem had drawn up his boat, and then the shore line was sandy once again.

"Here they are!" Ken pointed at the tracks that became visible the moment they approached the sand.

There was no difficulty in following the footprints then. They led straight along the beach to Barnes' dock and boathouse, but there was no sign of them beyond that point.

Sandy looked up toward the lodge. "He went up there-along the wooden walk," he said. "And we won't find prints on the planks."

Tod jumped up onto the walk. "We've trespassed this far. Let's go a little farther."

The others followed him along the well-built walk and straight onto the porch at its far end. All the windows in the house were covered by neatly pulled inner blinds, and when Tod gave an experimental twist to the doorknob he found it securely locked.

At the end of the porch two wooden steps led down to a path of white pebbles that curved around to the back of the house. Again Tod led the way, and they all went after him. The path ended in a wide pebbled area between the house and a two-car garage.

The pebbled surface showed no evidence of recent footsteps, but Sandy walked back and forth over it, peering down at the even layer of small white stones.

"Hah!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Fresh oil stains! There was a car parked here not long ago."

This time they all agreed with him. The three small circular patches he pointed out glistened wetly in the sunlight.

"Could somebody have come up here," Ken suggested, "with the idea of breaking into Mr. Barnes' lodge? It must be well known in Claytown that he's not at the place very often."

Tod, who had been rattling the garage door-and finding it locked too-now peered in through the unshaded window. "Empty," he reported. Then he turned to Ken. "But if somebody wanted to break into the lodge, why were they lying over there in the sand as if they were looking down at our camp?"

"I know. I don't think that suggestion makes much sense either," Ken agreed. "I was just trying to think of some explanation that didn't involve you and Dan, because you can't think of any reason why

somebody would be trying to spy on you.”

“No, I can’t.” Tod kicked at a pebble and sent it skittering. “And that nonsense about Humphreys really was nonsense. I’m pretty sure of that. But another thing I’m sure of is that the dig means too much to Dan and me for us to-” He broke off abruptly. “Come on. Let’s return to the camp and find out if Dan saw anything.”

Tod and the boys walked back in silence. Clem returned to his boat and chugged around the point. Ten minutes later they were all gathered at the camp site listening to Dan report that he had seen nothing except a faint trace of dust floating in the still air at the end of Barnes’ lane.

“A car might have gone around the corner there, kicking up the dust, a little while earlier,” he concluded.

“We know a car’s recently been parked back of Barnes’ house,” Tod told him. “It probably drove away just before you got there.” He went on to describe the rest of the evidence they had seen. “So I guess we were too late to catch him. What do you make of it?” he asked when he was finished.

Dan lifted his lean shoulders and let them drop. “I give up. It just doesn’t make any sense at all.”

“The only thing that seems clear,” Tod said, “is that somebody’s been spying on us. Who it is-or why he’s doing it-we still don’t know. Look, Clem,” he turned to the slight figure of the fisherman hunched on a packing case, “we want you to understand that you don’t have to stick with this job under the circumstances.”

Clem looked half-angry and half-hurt. “I suppose you’re sayin’ that because I told you I used to get out of this neighborhood when the rumrunners were around. I can see how you figure I don’t have much backbone, but-Well, this time I’m stickin’. Fact is, I’ve always been half-ashamed of the way I behaved in those days. I’d be glad of a chance to try facin’ up to whatever’s goin’ on around here this time. If it’s rumrunners, the way I thought at first-well, we’ll keep an eye out for ‘em and then report ‘em to the authorities. But if it’s somebody who’s just naturally got an eye on you two, and who wants to try to scare you out of doin’ this job-” Clem shook his head. “You just count me in, young man, whatever it is.”

Tod and Dan both smiled at him gratefully.

“Thanks, Clem,” Tod said. “We certainly aim to stay here until we’ve done what we came for, and it’s great to know we’ll have your help. But as for you two” -he turned to the boys-“I think you’d probably better find some place else to stay. I promised Bert you’d be safe here, but now I can’t be sure I can keep that promise. I don’t like the smell of this place.”

“That’s just because Dan doesn’t have the coffeepot on,” Sandy

said. "It smelled great this morning at breakfast time."

Tod and Dan laughed in spite of themselves.

"Sandy, this is serious," Dan protested.

Ken spoke up. "Sandy knows it's serious," he said. "He's just saying that we're not leaving either-unless you throw us out. After all, you took us in when we were in trouble. Besides, didn't we tell you we're detectives? Of course Bert might not agree with us on that, but we like to think we are. And we've never had an unseen watcher and a galloping horse ghost to work on before."

Sandy flexed his muscles. "Why don't we get this camp set up?" he asked. "How can we start digging until the shovels are unpacked?"

Dan looked at Tod. "If we don't find the site of the first glasshouse in this part of the country, it won't be because we don't have willing help. All right, everybody. Let's get to work." As he moved toward the nearest packing case, he added, "We'll put a footnote in our report saying that our success would have been impossible without the aid of Locum, Holt, and Allen. Your names will go down in history."

"If we find anything to write a report about," Tod corrected him.

In five minutes they had all been assigned their jobs and were hard at work. The rest of the morning passed quickly. Ken and Sandy drew the chore of leveling the ground where the two tents were to stand.

Shortly before noon Dan paused to inventory the contents of the ice chest as he lifted it out of the trailer. "We'll need more ice today. And the menu for lunch seems to be hot dogs. Any objections?"

Sandy straightened up briefly. "How many do I get? That's all I want to know."

"And how soon?" Tod added.

"I'll start them right away," Dan promised. "I could do them on the stove, but they're better over an open fire-if you can give me an extra five minutes and if somebody will collect a little driftwood from the beach."

"I'll do that." Ken moved off toward the creek.

Clem watched Dan scoop a shallow pit in the sand and nodded approvingly. "That's a good way to make a fire, especially right now when all the grass around here is so dry. Guess you boys know how to handle yourselves outdoors, all right."

"We ought to." Dan grinned. "We haven't slept under a roof half the nights in the past two years." He crumpled newspaper expertly and laid it in the bottom of his fire pit, and when Ken returned with an armload of dry wood he lost no time in starting the fire. Fifteen minutes later there was a small heap of glowing coals in the hole, and almost immediately the odor of sizzling meat filled the air.

Ken looked at his watch as he spread mustard on his hot dog, and saw that it was just time for a news broadcast. "Does anybody object if

I turn on the car radio?" he asked.

"Of course not," Dan said quickly.

Sandy met Ken's glance. "I'll run the car close up here, so we can all hear. Fix my hot dog in the meantime."

Ken nodded his thanks and reached for another roll. He had kept his mind busily occupied all morning, but concern for Richard Holt had always lain just beneath the surface. Now he didn't know whether he hoped the grand-jury waterfront probe would be mentioned in the news or not.

The broadcaster's first few items had no special interest for the little group seated in the shade of the stretched canvas, but suddenly Ken was leaning forward intently.

The announcer was saying, "In a surprise move this morning the Federal grand jury, acting on information received from the Internal Revenue Department, issued subpoenas to four men wanted for questioning in connection with alleged income-tax irregularities. Bank accounts and safe-deposit boxes belonging to the men were impounded at the same time, pending further investigation. Although the names of the men were not released, informed sources say the four are also due for subpoenas from the New York City grand jury investigating waterfront rackets. The special prosecuting attorney in charge of the waterfront probe replied to reporters' questions by saying merely that he was in touch with the Federal authorities. He refused to make any further comment at this time. And now we bring you the weather. Fair and warmer with the possibility of rain by tomorrow morning along the eastern--"

Ken had reached the car by then and flicked off the switch.

Dan said, "You look worried, Ken. Was that bad news so far as your father's investigation is concerned?"

"I'm not sure," Ken said slowly. "For the Internal Revenue Department to move in like this, ahead of the waterfront investigation-I don't know what it means.

"No, thanks," he said absent-mindedly, as Tod offered him another hot dog. "But would it be all right if I took off for a while this afternoon? I'd like to go to the inn long enough to call Dad and find out what it does mean."

"Of course," Tod told him quickly. "The only thing is that the pay phone at the inn is right out in the open -on the wall of the lobby. It's not a very good place to make a private call."

"You could use my phone," Clem offered.

Ken's face cleared. "Thanks, Clem. That would be a lot better." He looked over at Dan. "Didn't you say there was some shopping that had to be done today? I can take care of that while I'm in the village."

Dan grinned. "No, thanks. I believe in a cook doing his own

shopping. But I'll ride in with you and we'll get everything done at once." He waved a hand at his associate. "You and Sandy just finish things up here while we're gone."

"There's no need for me to go in," Clem pointed out. "You know where my house is, Dan. Just walk right in. I don't keep my door locked. And I can stay here and help Tod."

There was a little further argument, but Clem's suggestion was finally accepted. Ken and Dan took off in the jeep right after lunch. When they returned not much more than half an hour later they found the fire doused, the lunch things cleared away, and Tod directing his assistants at the job of hauling the sleeping tent up into place.

"What luck?" Sandy asked quickly, coming over to the jeep to help unload the ice and the carton of groceries.

"I couldn't get Dad," Ken told him. "But he'd left word at Global that he'd be there at nine thirty tonight, waiting for a call. I phoned Pop, though," he added. "Everything's fine there. Nothing new since last night." He raised his voice. "Thanks a lot, Clem. I reversed charges on both calls."

"You didn't need to do that," Clem muttered. "Guess I can let a friend make a phone call once in a while."

"Not Ken, you can't," Sandy told him. "When he gets to talking it's a lot safer if Global News or the *Advance* is paying the charges."

They all worked hard that afternoon, despite the heat. By three o'clock the sleeping tent was in order. Ken and Sandy set up the cots they had brought, and lined them up with the two Tod and Dan used. Empty packing cases served as storage space for clothes. Underfoot was a canvas floor stretched taut over the neatly leveled ground.

Two hours later the second tent, the work tent, was also completely organized. It, too, had a canvas floor, and a crude desk made of boards and boxes. On the desk a portable typewriter, several notebooks, and various maps and charts were ready for use. A compact chest nearby served as a camera storage box and a portable darkroom. Against the rear wall were ranged boxes and other containers for storing the specimens and artifacts the archaeologists hoped to find, a surveyor's transit, shovels and picks, and screens for sifting earth.

The two tents faced each other and over each doorway was a ten-foot flap that protected the openings from sun and rain. But these two flaps had been joined together overhead, to form a roofed breezeway between the tents. In this covered area Dan set up his kitchen, using a large packing case as a pantry and a base for his camp stove. Inside the case, out of the sun, there was room for his portable ice chest and an assortment of canned goods and staple foods.

By five o'clock everything was in order.



“Well, we made it!” Dan said on a note of satisfaction. “By tomorrow morning we can get our stakes in and start digging.”

“Tomorrow?” Tod repeated. “Why can’t I be checking the maps and drive some stakes right now-while you’re cooking dinner?”

Dan grinned. “If what we’re looking for is here, it’ll still be here tomorrow morning. But I know how you feel. Go ahead.” Then, as Tod started for the work tent, looking a little sheepish but determined, Dan added, “You’ll stay and eat with us, won’t you, Clem?”

Clem shook his head. “Thanks, not tonight-unless you want me for something, that is. I’ve got a mess of clam chowder in the refrigerator that needs eating.”

“Then you’d better go home,” Dan told him. “Your chowder probably beats my fried pork chops any day.”

Clem hesitated. “I’m willin’ to stay around, of course, if you think there might be some kind of trouble tonight.”

They had all been working so hard that for several hours they had had no time to worry over the mysterious watcher or the galloping horse.

There was a moment’s silence before Dan said, “Thanks, Clem. We’ll keep our eyes open, of course, but I can’t believe there’ll be any real trouble. You go on home and get a good night’s rest. You need it after the day we put you through.”

Still half-reluctant, Clem took his departure. They heard the sound of his motor dying away around the spit of land, as Tod came out of the work tent with his hands full.

“Will you get an ax, Ken, and some stakes?” he asked. “And, Sandy, if you’ll-“

The expression on Sandy’s face stopped him.

“Clem’s coming back,” Sandy said, listening. “His motor died away and then got louder again. Sure enough, here he comes!”

The little skiff had just appeared, heading toward them at full speed. Clem was standing in the stern and waving excitedly.

Tod thrust his armful of instruments back into the tent. “Something must be wrong.”

They were all standing on the little beach by the time Clem’s skiff nosed onto the sand.

“Someone was there again!” Clem said quickly, the moment he cut off his motor. “I just saw a car tear out of the Barnes lane!”

## CHAPTER VII

### PLOTTING THE DIG

Sandy spun around. "Come on! This time we'll catch him!"

Ken grabbed his arm to stop him. "No, we won't. He's got too much of a head start. He'll be in the village before we get as far as the road."

Sandy subsided. "You're right. But aren't we ever going to get a close look at this character? He keeps wandering around practically in front of us and then—" He kicked at the sand.

Dan's voice sounded calm in the midst of the tension that had suddenly taken hold of them. "We'll all think better after we've had some food," he said. "Come on, Clem. Change your mind and stay for supper."

"All right, I will." Clem's quick agreement suggested that his previous refusal had been prompted more by politeness than by inclination. "Sure don't want to make a nuisance of myself around here, but maybe I can help. I can cook other things besides clam chowder."

Tod looked undecided for a moment. Then he said, "Well, I suppose we might as well go ahead with staking out the dig." But some of the earlier enthusiasm had drained out of his voice. He added, glancing up toward the rise of land, "It's like trying to read a book with someone breathing down your neck."

"Cheer up, Tod," Dan said, leading the way back toward the tents. "Our real worry right now is whether this is going to turn out to be a good book or not."

"What makes you think the glasshouse was right around here?" Ken asked, in an effort to restore Tod's earlier excitement at the prospect of the first actual work on the dig.

"We know there were some buildings here," Tod told him. "There was a ferry over the stream right here, and—But wait until I spread out the map. You'll understand better then."

Once more he brought out the things he had put down when Clem made his unexpected return. Ken located an ax and the stakes Tod needed. Then Tod, with Sandy and Ken, went back again toward the edge of the creek. Tod put his equipment down beside the one big boulder that was visible along that part of the shore. Its rough, rounded surface protruded from the sand at a spot about ten feet away from the water. Alongside it Tod set up his transit, adjusting the legs with great care to make certain that the telescope was perfectly level.

Then he picked up a rolled chart and spread it out on the ground.

“Now the first thing we’ll do,” Tod explained, “is to figure out where to dig our exploratory trenches.” Already the excitement was coming back into his voice. “The idea is to locate them so that they’ll cut across the territory most likely to include what we’re looking for.”

“You mean,” Ken said, “you first take a sort of sampling of the area—a kind of cross section?”

“Exactly.” Tod tapped the map. “This is a copy of the oldest map we could find of this area. The original was undated, but by tracing back old documents and property records Dan and I decided it must have been made before 1750—maybe as early as 1700.”

Ken bent low over the neat pencil tracing. “But there are no buildings shown on here at all. In fact, there’s practically nothing on this map except the creek—and these lines crossing it.”

“That’s where the old road was,” Tod told him. “It came from the west, from the Delaware River, and continued eastward from here to the ocean. The road lines were drawn across the creek—instead of breaking on either side of it—to indicate that there was a ferry here. It was just a hand-poled scow, big enough for pedestrians and horsemen. On the original map it was marked as Petersen’s Ferry.”

“But where’s the glasshouse?” Sandy asked.

“That’s a good question,” Tod said. The grim set of his jaw had relaxed by now into some semblance of his usual smile. “Yes, that’s a corking good question.”

Sandy grinned. “And have you got a good answer?”

“Not now, but we hope we will have. This map helps, and we made another lucky find: a diary kept by an old Dutch gentlemen named Hans van Duyn. He was apparently a great traveler, and fortunately for us he kept a record of his routes and accommodations. He mentions taking a trip from the Delaware to the Atlantic by way of a route that was once an Indian trail. He says he crossed a small creek on a ferry operated by a man named Petersen, which makes us pretty certain he was talking about this creek. He stayed for the night at Petersen’s house—a crude sort of inn, I gather. And now comes the important part.”

Tod looked at them and they both waited expectantly. Already he had aroused their interest in the detective aspects of an archaeologist’s work.

“Van Duyn says,” Tod went on, “that he found it difficult to get a good night’s sleep at Petersen’s because of the heavy smoke from a glasshouse nearby. He even wrote in his diary that he complained to Petersen the next morning. Petersen apologized but explained that the smoke was a nuisance only when the wind blew from the southeast.”

“So the glasshouse was somewhere southeast of the inn,” Ken said.

“Right,” Tod agreed.

"But how far from the inn? And where was the inn?" Sandy asked.

"That," Tod said, "is the part of the answer we don't have yet-and of course it's a mighty big part. But at least we can make a stab at guessing, based on certain facts we do know. For example, all glasshouses in those days were considered a serious fire menace, so we can assume that nobody would build one too close to the inn. But we also know that the fuel for the glass furnace probably came from across the creek, where there was once a fine stand of pine and scrub oak. So we assume that the glasshouse wouldn't be set farther away from the creek, and the ferry that probably hauled the wood, than absolutely necessary. Putting these two factors together, Dan and I think the glasshouse may have been between two and three hundred feet from the inn, in a generally southeasterly direction."

"Pretty smart," Sandy said. "But that still leaves you with a lot of digging to do."

"Plenty of digging," Tod agreed. "Unless, of course, we're remarkably lucky and hit it right off."

"But first you have to find out where the inn was, don't you?" Ken asked.

"That's our first job," Tod agreed. "And we're going to start it right at this boulder. It shows on the map. You can see it right there." His finger pointed out the spot.

"But that can't be the same boulder, Tod," Sandy said, peering closely at the map. "The one marked on here is in the creek-right out in the water!"

"It's the same one, all right." Tod was grinning. "It's the water's edge that's moved not the rock." He unrolled another huge sheet of paper that proved to be a navigation chart. "Here, I'll show you what it looks like today. This is an up-to-date chart. Here we are. See? Where the creek forms a rough S-with that spit of land making the top curve of the S. Our camp site is right there, on the bottom curve-and that's the same place the old ferry used to come ashore.

"Now as the water sweeps around the spit," Tod went on, "it brings silt with it, and the silt is deposited right here, in front of our camp site. Earlier charts made it possible for us to figure how much the shore line was increased, every ten years or so, by those silt deposits. As nearly as we can figure it, the shore line at this point has advanced about twenty feet in the last two hundred years."

"Advanced?" Sandy repeated. "Do you mean that the spot we're standing on now-and this rock-used to be in the middle of the creek?" He sounded unbelieving.

"Not in the middle, exactly, but it was out there, all right-or rather, the water was up here," Tod assured him. He stood to ease his muscles. "So this is where we begin our calculations. The same old

map that shows the road, also shows this rock, at a spot about two hundred and fifty feet due south of the road. So what we'll do first is to try to find some evidence of the old road."

"And when that's placed, you can begin to look for evidence of the inn, which probably stood close to the road," Ken took it up.

"You've got the idea," Tod told him. "And when the inn site is established, we can then begin to look for the glasshouse somewhere southeast of it."

"Wow!" Sandy said softly. "And we think we're detectives!"

Tod grinned. "If you really are, you ought to make good archaeologists," he said. "Well, here goes!"

He sighted through the transit and in a matter of moments had directed Sandy to drive a stake at the proper position. Then he helped Ken run a line from that stake to one driven directly beneath the transit.

When that was done, Tod handed Ken a steel tape. "Measure off two hundred and fifty feet along that line," he said. "This is a fifty-foot tape, so that'll be five lengths of it."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Tod grinned. "You probably could have figured that out for yourself. Guess I'm a little overanxious."

"With all the figuring you've got to do from now on, I should think you would be," Sandy said. "We'll both count it off to make sure it's right."

"Here it is—two hundred and fifty feet to the inch," Ken called, a moment afterward.

"Right. Drive a stake at that spot," Tod directed.

He took a deep breath when the stake was in. "Well, that's where the road began again, this side of the ferry—I hope."

"Now," Tod went on a moment later as he joined the boys, "we know from the map the direction the road took, so the next thing to do is to mark out its route for a short distance."

He swung the telescope transit off his shoulder and set it up again, directly over the stake Ken had just driven. He turned it until it pointed east and then peered through the eyepiece.

"I am now sighting along what I hope was the route of the road," he explained. "Hmm," he murmured. "Looks like it went right between our two tents, right through Dan's kitchen in the breezeway. Take a stake up toward the tents, Sandy, and drive it in where I tell you to."

When Sandy had done his job, Ken said, "Want a line stretched between this stake and Sandy's new one?"

Tod shook his head. "Too close to our tents, we might trip over it in the dark. We'll run the line in the morning and that will give us all

day to get used to where it is. And right after breakfast we can start digging along the line.”

Once more Tod picked up his transit. “If Dan and I are as good archaeologists as we think we are, we ought to find our first signs of that old road tomorrow.”

Sandy was coming toward them. “Dan says to tell you the pork chops are in the pan.”

“Good,” Tod said. “I’m about ready for them.”

Together, they gathered up the rest of the equipment and headed up toward the tents. The big frying pan was sending out waves of appetizing odors by the time they had stowed the gear in the work tent and had washed in the cold well water.

“Here, Sandy.” Dan handed him a big pot. “You look strong enough to mash potatoes and to get all the lumps out of them. Ken, will you fill the water bucket? I’ll need some for coffee.”

Clem, in the meantime, was opening two cans of peas and dumping them into a small pot Dan set on the stove. “Got a lid for this pot?” he asked.

“Coming up.” Dan put his hand on it in an instant and handed it over. “So far,” he told the boys, “everything’s been just where we looked for it. This place is really organized!”

“I don’t see how you can do all that cooking on your junky little tin-“

Tod interrupted Sandy with a stern “Uh-uh! Don’t insult Dan’s pride and joy. One mean word about that explosive tin gadget and he’s likely to quit in a huff. And nobody else can even light it, let alone boil coffee on it.”

Dan grinned and set out five tin plates on the table, contrived out of two boards set up on packing cases. “All right,” he said. “Dinner is now served.”

Half an hour later Sandy leaned back at a perilous angle on his folding camp stool. “I don’t know how you do it, but you certainly are one of the great chefs of all time. Imagine what your performance would be on a four-burner stove!”

Dan smiled. “Two burners seem quite a luxury for me. I’ve made do with open fires for months on end. In fact, this whole setup here is pretty fancy-meat and fresh vegetables available in a village just three miles away, and a place to get ice for the icebox. What more could anybody want?”

“Dan’s right.” Tod was applying a match to his pipe. “This is certainly different from our last dig. There we lived on canned and dehydrated food for months, and had to boil every drop of water we drank. And there were bugs that apparently thought we rubbed repellent all over ourselves to provide them with a specially tasty

sauce.”

“Even so we must have tasted pretty bitter,” Dan said, “from the quinine we had to keep pouring into ourselves. And the snakes”-he shook his head-“we didn’t dare leave camp without a gun or a machete.”

“Even the Indians around there were inclined to treat us like enemies,” Tod said. “They thought we were disturbing their ancestors.”

Clem’s dry voice brought them up short. “I wonder who you’re disturbin’ around here?” he asked.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SETTING A TRAP

There was a silence after Clem's words. In the sudden stillness they were all conscious of a faint chill in the air, despite the warm brightness of the level sunrays.

Ken was the first to speak. "What made you put it just like that, Clem? Do you think the mystery around the dig here really means that Tod and Dan are disturbing somebody?"

Sandy didn't give Clem a chance to answer. "I've got it! Somebody was all set to look for Captain Kidd's treasure around here when you two showed up." He gestured toward the young archaeologists. "First he tried to scare you away with the galloping horse sound, and then when he discovered you wouldn't leave, he started to spy on you. He wants to make sure you don't find the treasure before he gets a chance at it himself."

Tod looked disbelieving. "You mean someone thinks we're looking for gold?" He shook his head. "Everybody in town knows what we're here for. We talked about it pretty freely when we were down here making a preliminary survey a couple of weeks ago. Got several of the store owners all excited, in fact. They hope we'll find some historic ruins that will bring lots of visitors to town and increase their business."

Sandy refused to be discouraged. "The person might not think you were looking for the treasure yourself. As long as he wanted to look for it, and was planning to do his looking right around here, he'd naturally want to get rid of you."

This time it was Clem who shook his head. "Folks around here gave up lookin' for that treasure years ago. Maybe at one time they pretty well dug up the whole coast, but nobody's wasted time on it lately. They know better now."

"It wouldn't have to be somebody from around here," Sandy pointed out. "In fact, it probably isn't. That cigarette package with the New York stamp--"

Now Dan was shaking his head too, and Sandy stopped.

"The legends about Kidd burying gold along this coast have been so discredited, Sandy," Dan Galen pointed out, "that nobody with a grain of sense would travel even a quarter of a mile with the idea of looking for Kidd's treasure. In a few localities local legends persist, but they're never believed outside a very small radius."

Sandy slumped back. "O.K. I'll have to take your word for it. But who is spying on you then?"



Ken turned toward the two scientists. "You say everybody in town knows what you're doing here. That means, then, that any strangers could also find out pretty easily."

"That's right," Dan agreed. "Anybody in Claytown could tell them. Probably would tell them without being asked, in fact. Tod was right. They all got very interested in what we're going to do down here."

"Then nobody would be spying on you to find out *what* you are doing," Ken said. "But could they be watching you to find out what progress you're making?"

"Anybody who wants to find that out can walk right up and ask us," Dan pointed out. "We've made it clear around town that we'll be glad to have visitors-if anybody's interested."

"Of course," Tod said slowly, "if Humphreys really wanted to find out what we're doing, this is probably the way he'd go about it." He jerked his head back impatiently. "But I don't believe it. He wouldn't pull such a crazy stunt. It would make him a laughingstock if he were found out."

Clem spoke a little diffidently. "I don't like to keep harkin' back to that gallopin' noise last night. But if somebody did that with the idea of scarin' you out of here, they might have come around today to try and find out how you'd reacted to it-what you were doin' about it."

"Well," Dan said wryly, "if that's the case, at least we've showed them that we have no intention of leaving here. But if they know we've made several unsuccessful attempts to catch them, they're probably enjoying a good laugh."

"And they're probably also amused by the fact that the Wilkins brothers didn't show up." Tod's big hand closed into a fist. "I'd certainly like to have a talk with this-this-"

"Well, why don't we?" Ken asked. As they all stared at him, he went on, "So far as I can see there are only two ways of reaching that spot on the hill up there, where the watcher presumably stays. He must either get there by boat, down the creek, or by land along the road from town and then down the Barnes lane. We assume he has a car, but he may have a boat too, so we ought to check both routes. If we do that-if we watch the head of the lane and the creek-we'll spot anybody who comes along, won't we?"

"You mean spend all day tomorrow playing cops and robbers?" Tod asked. "I'll admit I'd like to know what's going on, but-"

"We could try it tonight," Ken said. "We know somebody was here last night-the men who ran away when Dan called out to them. And the galloping horse incident was last night. So maybe if we set a couple of lookouts we'll pick up something, even if it's not our hilltop spy."

He leaned forward and used his finger to draw imaginary lines on

the table. "I think there ought to be just one of us stationed at the creek, and one where Barnes' lane runs into the road." He gestured toward Claytown. In that general direction, half a mile from the faint tracks that came in from the road to their own camp, and parallel to them, was the neat lane that led from the road toward Barnes' lodge. "The rest of us," Ken added, "can stay here, waiting for a signal and keeping an eye on things just in case."

"And what'll we do if someone comes?" Sandy asked.

"The watcher will try to find out where he's going, and return to camp and get the rest of us. Then we can make whatever approach seems best, depending on his information."

Nobody had any immediate objection. While they were still thinking over Ken's plan, Sandy said, "We'd better have a signal, so we can call the second watcher back to camp if the first one comes in with a report."

Tod unexpectedly put his hands to his mouth and gave forth a loud yodellike call. When they all jumped with surprise, he said, "That's a loon. Our signal call."

Dan grinned. "Well, pardner, I see you plan to fall in with this scheme. I guess I do too," he added. "If there's any chance of settling this thing tonight-of getting this mystery cleared up-I'm all for it. I'll stand guard up at the head of Barnes' lane."

"And I'll take the creek," Clem offered. "I'll take the skiff and lay just offshore, opposite Barnes' house. I can usually kind of feel it if a boat's comin', even if I don't see it."

By nine o'clock the camp was cleaned up. The sky was almost dark-clear overhead but with a heavy pile of clouds blotting out the new stars toward the east. The sun had gone down in an ominous red haze, and Clem had said that they might get a storm later on.

"But understand," he added quickly, "I still aim to go through with this scheme. I'm not sayin' that to hint I want to get out of my part of it."

Dan dropped an arm over his shoulders. "Don't worry, Clem. We know you by now."

Ken and Sandy were getting into the convertible to drive to Clem's house again, to call Richard Holt.

"Anything we can bring you, Clem?" Ken called out.

"No, thanks. Just make yourselves at home."

Less than ten minutes later Sandy eased the convertible into Clem's neat driveway made of white oyster shells, and they let themselves into a kitchen that was as neat and clean as the galley on a well-kept yacht.

"The phone's in the parlor," Ken said. He led the way through a doorway into a small hall that ended at the front door.

Richard Holt must have been waiting alongside his phone because the connection went through almost immediately.

"Ken?" his voice said. "Good. How are you both?"

"Fine, Dad." Ken moved the phone away from his ear so that Sandy could hear the conversation too. "We heard the noon broadcast. What broke loose?"

"You two did. At least that started it."

"You mean what happened last night?" Sandy asked.

"That's right. The men who were arrested last night in some farmer's pasture"-there was a brief note of laughter in Holt's voice-"work for a man named Tex Walters. The special prosecutor has been keeping an eye on Walters, along with three others-Red Davis, Louis Gorman, and Roger Finn. All four are suspected of being pretty high up in the crime syndicate-the organization that includes the waterfront protection gang. They're probably not the top bosses, but they may be second-in-command. So naturally when Pop relayed your message to me last night I got in touch with the special prosecutor and he alerted his men. And, sure enough, they spotted signs of Walters' imminent departure.

"Unfortunately," Holt went on, "the prosecutor had no grounds for arresting him immediately, but he did get in touch with the Internal Revenue people. He knew they'd recently been investigating the income-tax returns of some of the same men he was keeping an eye on. And the Internal Revenue people agreed to subpoena all four of those men for questioning. They did better than that-they also got a court order impounding all their bank accounts and safe-deposit boxes. They couldn't be sure a subpoena would keep them from running off, but they thought the men couldn't possibly make a getaway without funds."

"So that was it!" Ken said. "Sounds like quick work."

"Unfortunately not quick enough-or not complete enough," Holt said.

"Why? What else has happened?"

"All four men have shaken their shadows and vanished," Holt said. "Maybe they had loot cached away that the Federal men didn't know about. At any rate they're gone. There's a nationwide alert out for them-all airports, railroad stations, and ports of exit are being checked. But nothing's turned up so far."

Ken's voice was worried. "How does all this affect you? Are you likely to be in more danger than ever, now that these men are on the loose?"

"No," Holt said quickly. "I should have made that clear right away. The heat is probably off altogether so far as I'm concerned. One or all of those four men were undoubtedly responsible for the warnings sent

to me, and their disappearance suggests pretty conclusively that they've given up that tactic-that they take for granted now that I'm going ahead.

"But don't worry," he added. "We're not going to be careless. Granger insists that Tom Golden still stick with me wherever I go. And we still think you two ought to stay where you are for the next couple of days just to be on the safe side."

"Whew!" Ken breathed. "Well, I'm sure relieved to hear that."

"Relieved to be staying down there longer?" Holt sounded puzzled.

Ken laughed. "No. I meant relieved to hear you're probably out of danger." Then he added, "Matter of fact, we'd kind of hate to leave here now even if we could."

"But you were supposed to be helping Bert's friend," his father reminded him. "Are you just spending your time fishing?"

Sandy edged closer and spoke into the mouthpiece. "The only thing we're fishing for down here is a ghost."

"A what?"

"Sandy's right, Dad. There's something funny going on here and we'd really hate to leave before it's cleared up. Besides, the local men who were all lined up to work for Tod won't work now that the ghost has turned up, so they need us."

"What kind of ghost is this?" Holt wanted to know.

"A ghost horse. He gallops."

Holt's reply was somewhere between a laugh and a groan. "Well, I might have known you'd manage to get mixed up in something! But as long as it's only a ghost horse--"

Sandy opened his mouth to speak into the phone and Ken instinctively edged him away. He knew Sandy was about to mention the other curious evidence they'd noted at the dig-the signs of the watcher on the hill. Ken was certain that his father, tense with the strain of the forthcoming hearing, wouldn't find that as amusing as he seemed to find the galloping horse. He might even insist that the boys leave Tod and Dan, and find another place to stay.

"Well, tell Granger he may hear from us any day now," Ken said. "Claytown's Galloping Horse Ghost-exclusive photos and story by Allen and Holt."

It felt good to hear his father laughing. When he had hung up, he explained to Sandy why he hadn't let him speak.

Sandy nodded. "Yes, I guess you were right. The only trouble is, he probably thinks now that we're completely crazy."

Ken grinned. "Well, Dad's usually right."

They slowed down as they passed the lane into Barnes' property and Ken called softly, "Dan?"

A figure rose from among the low bushes and waved.

“Nothing yet,” Dan said.

A few minutes later they were parked alongside the jeep and walking toward the work tent. Light shone faintly through the canvas walls and inside they found Tod poring over the old map.

“We saw Dan,” Ken said, as Tod looked up. “Is Clem already on guard too?”

Tod nodded. “He rowed out, making about as much noise as an eel makes sliding through the water. He can certainly handle that boat of his!” He reached for his pipe. “Did you get your father all right? And what’s the news from the water front?”

Sandy grinned. “Things are popping all over. And guess who started it?”

“I can guess. But what happened?”

Ken told him what they had learned, and then they settled down to wait.

Time passed slowly. The rising wind made a deep sighing sound as it swept over the grass, but otherwise no noise broke the stillness outside the tent.

They were all half-relieved when, by eleven thirty, Tod suggested a check on the tent ropes. The canvas was already bellying heavily and the flaps that formed the roof of the little breezeway were beginning to snap.

“Pull them a little tighter,” Tod directed, “but don’t take out all the slack. If it rains the ropes will shrink, and if they’re too tight something will give way.”

Another half-hour went by and the wind seemed to increase steadily. Tod got up and stood in the opening of the swaying tent. “I think I’ll call them both in,” he said.

Almost immediately a stooped figure materialized out of the dark.

“It’s only me.” Clem leaned against the wind that tore the words out of his mouth.

Tod made way for him and Clem entered the tent to sag down on a chair that Sandy pushed forward. “I figured nobody would be fool enough to try comin’ down the creek on a night like this, so I came on in,” Clem said.

“We’ll go out for Dan, shall we?” Ken asked.

“No need to.” Dan was standing in the doorway. “I’m here.” He, too, sank down on one of the camp chairs. “What a night!” He looked at Clem. “I gather you didn’t see anything either?”

Clem shook his head.

Dan reached out and turned up the lamp. “Exactly two cars drove down that road all evening,” he said. “Yours”—he looked at the boys—“and one other. You at least slowed down at Barnes’ lane. The driver of the other apparently didn’t even know there was a lane

there.” He grinned ruefully. “Oh, well, as an archaeologist I ought to be used to getting no results.”

Clem was leaning toward him. “Another car? That’s mighty funny. That road ends dead on the beach. Nobody uses it much except folks who go down there for surf fishing. And why would anybody be trying that on a night-“

The sound that interrupted him sounded at first like a gunshot. They all jumped. Then Tod leaped for the door.

“One of the ropes on the roof of the breezeway here,” he called back. “Nothing serious. I’ll just ...” His voice died away for an instant and then he said on a curious new note, “Come out here a minute.”

Dan was already in the doorway, on his way to help Tod. Now the others crowded behind him.

“That light over there.” Tod was pointing in the direction of the road. “It doesn’t look like a car, exactly, or-“

“That’s a fire!” Clem broke in.

The others looked at him blankly, and then turned their eyes toward the glow in the east.

“Come on!” Clem commanded. “The grass is burning -and the wind is blowing it right this way!”

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ENEMY STRIKES

As Clem shouted, the fitful glow surged upward, its color changing from yellow to a blazing red. And in that same instant the fire grew perceptibly wider-to a great arc perhaps a hundred feet across. Smoke and sparks were being blown toward them at express-train speed. Even at a distance of a quarter of a mile the leaping flames became visible, shooting high into the air from the tall tinder-dry grass.

Tod grabbed Dan's shoulder. "I'll stay here. You take the jeep and go to town for help!"

"No!" Clem's voice, suddenly authoritative, stopped Dan before he had taken a step. "Either we lick this right away or nobody will be able to stop it. Come on!" He started on a run for the creek.

Tod hesitated. "Shall we bring buckets-pans?"

"No! Come on!" Clem's arm beckoned in an imperative gesture.

They went after him then, all of them, half-stumbling in the dry powdery sand.

By the time they reached the skiff, Clem was pawing under its rear seat. "Soak them in the water!" he ordered, tossing ashore half a dozen big burlap sacks. "Get them good and wet!"

They got in each other's way in the darkness, and Ken found he was pulling at one end of a sack that Sandy was holding. But they were straightened out finally, and tearing back toward the fire with Clem in the lead, trailing their heavy soaked sacks behind them.

"Work from the edges!" Clem ordered. "Try to keep it from spreadin' out."

Tod and Dan headed southward, Sandy and Ken northward toward the Barnes fence. Glancing back over his shoulder, Ken saw that a shower of sparks had landed almost at Clem's feet, to start up a new blaze far ahead of the major one. Clem was already beating at it with his wet sack.

The boys were out of breath by the time they came within fighting distance of the fire. Its front had widened so rapidly that it was now within twenty feet of the fence. And it was sweeping speedily forward at the same time, under the relentless drive of the wind.

Ken could feel the heat on his face as he brought his sack down on the blazing grass. Several square feet of flame disappeared under the blow. Sandy, alongside him, doused a patch of equal size.

Again and again their sacks rose and fell, and each time a patch of fire died. Acrid smoke billowed around them, choking their throats and filling their eyes with tears. Ken could barely see. He felt sure that

they were keeping the fire from widening any farther toward the fence, but equally sure that they were not driving the margin back. They were barely holding their own. And the fire was still surging forward toward the creek at an amazing speed.

Up and down, up and down, Ken flailed his sack first with one arm and then with the other. His muscles ached agonizingly and the skin of his face and hands felt scorched. A stray gust of wind whipped the flame backward and he brushed sparks out of his hair. For a moment he stood still, breathing hard, and then he began again-up and down, up and down.

Suddenly Clem was beside them. "One of you come with me. I'm goin' around behind. Try to cut through the line and divide it into two parts." Without waiting for an answer he went on past them.

Sandy went after him. A moment later the big redhead and the small gray-haired man were working side by side, as methodically as machines.

"Good boy!" Clem muttered.

The flames licked forward away from them and they followed so close behind, dousing as they went, that Sandy could feel the burning heat through his shoes. But they were making a little headway. At that one narrow spot they were beating out the heels of the fire a little faster than the spear of the blaze was moving forward.

Ken's voice came to them faintly. "It's getting away here!"

Sandy hesitated, arm upraised. Then he heard Dan's voice shouting, "Hold it! I'm coming!" and Sandy let his sack fall once more alongside Clem's.

With a surge of relief Ken saw Dan coming. "Over here!" he called.

Dan turned slightly. And suddenly he went down in a crumpled heap. Still clutching his sack Ken ran toward him. Dan was already struggling to his feet.

"I'm O.K. That ankle-turned it again. Where do you want me?"

Ken saw the lines of pain in the smoke-grimed face but knew that Dan would not give in no matter how much he urged him. So he didn't try. "Over here."

Side by side, they tackled the new tongue of flame that was shooting northward, springing out from the main trunk of the fire like a new limb sprouting from a tree.

"We'll never make it!" Ken found himself thinking desperately, as his arm moved numbly up and down. The grass was too dry. The wind was too strong. As he beat out the blazing clumps of grass along the fence, he knew that behind him the fire was racing onward toward the creek and that it would consume the tents and all the equipment before it finally died at the water's edge.

A moment later he knew that Clem had reached the same



conclusion. With Sandy just behind him he came trotting past.

"Come on!" Clem said. "We'll have to start a backfire. About a hundred feet this side of the tents. Move the cars first."

"Right." Dan answered for all of them as they staggered down the rise in his wake.

"You boys take care of the cars," Dan added, as they neared the camp.

"I'll get the Jeep," Sandy said. Ken nodded and started toward the convertible.

The two engines roared alive and both vehicles leaped forward, their wheels churning the soft sand. Only when the front wheels were actually on the beach did the boys bring the cars to a halt. Then they leaped out and started back up toward the fire that was plunging toward them.

When they had passed the tents, Sandy said, "Got some matches?"

Ken nodded without breaking his stride. Off to his left he could see Tod and Dan and Clem, already beating back the new fires they had started.

Ken lit a match and thrust it into the grass. Instantly it took fire. He handed the matches to Sandy and began beating at the small blaze he had started, forcing it to move backward against the wind and toward the advancing wall of flame.

Twenty feet away Sandy started another small blaze and then he too began to slap away at it. Both of them were moving more slowly now. Weariness added heavy pounds to the weight of the sacks.

Through the blinding smoke Ken tried to discover whether their maneuver was having any success. The new blazes had run together now into a long strip fronted by a narrow band of burned-over grass. If they could make that band a little wider, Ken found himself thinking, they might win after all. Even in the high wind the fire couldn't leap too great a distance. It could only advance where there was grass to feed it, and the new backfire was slowly eating away the fuel in this limited space between the tents and the onrushing blaze.

Suddenly Ken swung his head. There was a patch of bright orange flame behind him. Sparks had blown high and landed behind the backfire.

"Sandy!" Ken yelled. "It's gotten away!" Frenziedly he began to beat at the spit of flame licking toward the tents.

"I can't leave this one!" Sandy shouted back. "It's getting away too!"

"Clem!" Ken called, his arm still moving up and down. "We need help!"

He heard Clem's answering hail and then saw him running forward. Behind him came Dan's limping figure.

“Here!” Ken directed their way through the smoke. Already the tongue of flame had advanced fifty feet.

Then Dan and Clem were both beside him, trying desperately to stem the backfire that was now completely out of control.

Even their united efforts couldn’t halt its progress. What had been a hundred feet of space between them and the tents was less than a minute later half that much. The larger fire in the rear had met the backfire in several spots, and had burned itself out at those places. But at both ends of the line it was threatening to sweep around and engulf them—to outflank the backfire and continue unabated toward the creek, directly over the equipment-filled tents.

Now they were all fighting in a semicircle of flame—an arc that grew tighter with each second and with each blast of wind.

Even Tod and Sandy, the strongest of them, were gasping for breath.

“It’s no use.” Dan looked as if he could hardly stand. “We’re licked!”

Clem’s voice was almost a groan. “If it would only rain! That would save us.” Suddenly his sack fell apart in his hands, charred to nothingness. For an instant he looked down at the blackened scrap in his fingers, wordlessly, and then he straightened. “Ken! More sacks in the boat—quick!”

Ken threw his own sack to Clem and turned to run toward the creek when he was overcome with a fit of coughing that forced him to stop. It left him limp and helpless, but he stumbled off again and had walked half a dozen steps before Sandy grabbed him and swung him around. Only then did Ken realize that, befuddled by smoke and exhaustion, he had been heading in the wrong direction.

“You all right?” Sandy held his arm firmly.

Ken started to answer, but the coughing overcame him again, bending him double. When he could straighten up he shook off Sandy’s hand. “I’m O.K.”

Tod’s harsh voice sounded out of the smoke. “Sandy, bring some towels—handkerchiefs—anything we can tie over our faces!”

“O.K. Come on,” Sandy added to Ken, and together they staggered through the murk. They found the tents because Sandy tripped over a guy rope and dragged Ken down with him.

When they managed to get to their feet they felt their way along the canvas walls to the breezeway. The gasoline lantern, still burning in the work tent, seemed feeble as a firefly’s glow in the dense smoke.

“Look!” Ken pointed to one wall of the tent where a red spark glowed viciously.

Sandy snatched up the water bucket and dashed it onto the canvas. “Get the sacks,” he said. “Duck your head in the creek too. I’ll find the

towels and join you in a minute. Want to wet down the tents first.”

Ken disappeared toward the creek. Sandy made four frantic trips to the pump, dashing back each time to hurl water to the peak of the tents. When it cascaded down over his own head he gasped with relief.

Then he raced into the sleeping tent, groped for the flashlight he had left on his cot, and spent precious seconds rounding up towels. He paused once, certain that he had heard Ken shout, but stuck grimly to his search until his begrimed hand was clutching five towels—one for each of the weary fire fighters. They trailed in the sand at the end of his dragging arm as he made for the creek.

Halfway to the water he stopped. Something wet had just struck his forehead. Sandy looked upward. A second later he was shouting hoarsely, “Rain! Rain! It’s raining!”

Like an echo somewhere behind him, he could hear Tod’s voice and Dan’s pick up the near-hysterical chant. “Rain! Rain!”

Sandy’s flashlight stabbed ahead and the beam of light spread out on the white hull of Clem’s skiff. “Ken!” he called.

There was no answer. Had Ken already found the new supply of sacks, doused them, and started up toward the fire again? “Ken?” Sandy called again, swinging his light left and right in a wide arc. Suddenly it showed a dim bent-over figure stumbling northward toward Barnes’ property.

Sandy shouted. “You’re going the wrong way! Ken!”

An almost solid mass of water struck him then. The rain had come with a vengeance. It plastered Sandy’s eyes shut and he instinctively flung an arm up as a shield.

But the downpour was deliciously wet and cool. For a moment he stood still, letting the rain soak into his parched skin. He even lifted his head and opened his mouth, to let the rain pour down his throat.

When he came to out of his watery trance, shaking his head and rubbing a hand over his eyes so that he could see again, he looked once more in the direction of Barnes’ land. The bent-over figure was still making its way toward the hill. “Ken!” Sandy shouted again, but the figure didn’t stop.

“What’s the matter with him?” Sandy wondered, half in alarm and half in irritation. He took off on a long slant planned to take him to the top of the hill in time to cut Ken off.

Already the smell of steam and of wet burned grass was adding *itself* to the acrid odor of smoke. The red blaze of the fire was dying to a red glare—even fading to blackness here and there.

Sandy had taken scarcely ten steps forward when he stumbled and fell flat, his light flying out of his hands. He got to his knees and recovered it, his fingers fumbling for the switch. It still worked. He

pointed it down toward the ground to see what had tripped him. The towels he had dropped were lying there in a heap, covering a dark mound. Sandy shoved them aside and caught his breath.

He was staring at Ken's prone body, face pressed into the sand, clothes plastered against his back by the driving rain.

"Ken!" The motionless body stirred slightly as Sandy rolled it over. Ken struggled to sit up and Sandy helped him, supporting him on one arm. "What happened? You hurt?"

Ken rubbed vaguely at his jaw. "He hit me," he mumbled. "I ran into somebody down here-and he hit me." He started to get shakily to his feet.

Suddenly Sandy remembered the figure he had seen running toward Barnes' fence. That hadn't been Ken after all, he realized. It must have been Ken's assailant.

"Stay here!" Sandy ordered, and started off, stabbing his light ahead of him through the slanting rain.

Behind him, he could hear Ken coming too, but he couldn't waste time and energy to advise him once more to stay where he was. The bent-over figure must be several hundred feet in the lead now, in the tall grass at the foot of the slope.

For a brief instant, Sandy's light caught a dark shape up ahead, and then lost it again. His long legs lengthened their stride over the rough ground. Again his light found the figure-and again he lost it. But in that brief glimpse he knew he was gaining on it.

Finally he fastened his light once more on his quarry, and kept it there. The man was climbing the slope now, and slowing up fast. The distance between them narrowed to a hundred feet-to seventy-five feet-to fifty.

But on the slope it was difficult to keep him in view. The grass was waist-high there, and becoming higher still as the running figure ahead neared the ridge.

Sandy shaved another ten feet from the gap between them, and then the man disappeared. Sandy stopped momentarily, trying to rediscover his position. But the wind waved the grass so violently that it was impossible to be sure of anything. Was that the movement of a man over there or just grass bending low in the wind? Finally, still uncertain, Sandy moved forward again toward the spot where he had last seen the running figure.

Behind him, Ken was laboring up the hill, calling as he ran. Sandy pressed on stubbornly. A faint blur of motion on his right made him whirl swiftly in that direction. For a split second his light revealed a bulky shape leaping toward him. Sandy ducked. A fist whistled past his head just as he pivoted out of reach. His own unencumbered right hand drew back for a return blow.

He heard Ken shout just as his fist started to move forward. He never completed the swing. His right arm was grasped from behind and he was pulled bodily around. A blow landed flush on his jaw.

Sandy's head snapped back under the impact. He stumbled backward, righting to recover his footing, as another blow struck his left wrist. The flashlight flew upward in a wide arc to land out of sight in the tall grass.

"Sandy!" Ken's voice sounded close. "I'm coming!"

Sandy was wobbling but still on his feet, his arms flailing at empty air, when Ken materialized out of the darkness beside him.

"Are you hurt?" Ken asked, as Sandy had asked him only a few brief moments before.

And now it was Sandy who was fingering his jaw and shaking his head. "I don't think so. But there were two of them-there must have been two of them."

"That's right," Ken said. "I saw the second one by the light of your flash. I yelled, but it was too late." He left Sandy's side for a moment and returned with the flashlight. Slowly he swung it in a circle around them. The yellowish glow showed nothing but rain and rain-wet grass flattened by the wind. "They're gone now," Ken said.

Sandy was still rubbing his jaw. "But not forgotten," he muttered.

## CHAPTER X

### TWENTY-FOUR-HOUR GUARD

It was a completely sodden quintet that huddled in the work tent a little later. The drumming of rain on the canvas had given way to a gentle patter. The cloudburst had passed on almost as suddenly as it had come. But its work had been well done. Not a spark remained of the raging conflagration. Even the heavy smell of the burned-over area was being rapidly blown away by the abating wind.

The boys told their story and showed their bruised jaws-now turning blue where the blows had landed.

"What was he doing-the man who hit you, Ken?" Tod asked.

"I didn't even see him until I bumped straight into him," Ken admitted. "My eyes were full of tears from the smoke. He was stooped over. I don't think he saw me any more than I saw him."

"But he must have heard us a few minutes before, when we were here at the tents," Sandy pointed out. "We certainly made enough noise, yelling and pumping water to slosh on the canvas."

"He couldn't help knowing somebody was around fighting the fire," Tod added. "But go ahead. Tell us again exactly how it happened."

Ken grinned ruefully. "I don't know a thing more than I've already told you. I was groggy. By the time I realized it was a man I'd bumped

into, and not one of the cars, he'd pulled back and let me have one. And the next thing I knew Sandy was standing over me."

"So the man I saw running off toward the hill must have been the one who hit Ken," Sandy took up the account. "But he wasn't the one who hit me, I'm sure of that. There must have been at least two of them-the one I was chasing and the one Ken saw come up behind me."

Dan had ducked into the other tent and now he came limping back. "There's no sign of them having taken anything," he reported. "And no sign of deliberate damage anywhere."

"We stopped to check on both cars before we came back here," Sandy said. "They're O.K. too. So what do you suppose they wanted?"

"You masterminds work on it," Dan said, "while I see if I can rustle up some hot coffee."

Clem began to stuff the blackened bowl of his corncob pipe.

"Well," he said then, "whatever they were after, they must have wanted it pretty bad-bad enough to start a field fire so they could get it."

"I've been thinking the same thing," Tod admitted. "But then I realized the fire might have been started accidentally. We know it began up near the road. Somebody might have driven along there and tossed a lighted cigarette out of the car."

There was a triumphant whoop from the breezeway. "Got the stove going!" Dan reported. "Coffee in fifteen minutes."

"A sandwich wouldn't be exactly abhorrent to me," Sandy said wistfully.

"Coming up," Dan assured him.

Clem got to his feet. "While we're waitin' we might go on up to the road. Just might see somethin' there that would give us an idea about what caused the fire."

"Even thinking about a sandwich gives me the strength to go down to the beach and bring up the jeep," Sandy said, hauling himself upright. "Wait here."

"Don't be too long," Dan said, as they all left. "I'm going to eat in ten minutes whether you're back or not."

They needed only half that time. They knew that a fire started accidentally-from a lighted cigarette or a still-burning match dropped in the grass-would have spread in the shape of a fan, as the wind swept it toward the water. But they didn't find just one fan-shaped starting point at the edge of the road: they found three, spaced at regular intervals.

"Well," Tod said, "that convinces me. Not that I needed much convincing. But I still can't get used to the idea that somebody may be trying to injure us deliberately-or that anybody would deliberately want to hold up our work."

They didn't try to discuss the matter further until they got back to the tent. The rain had stopped completely by that time and the wind seemed to be dying own. And they all felt revived somewhat by the very smell of Dan's powerful coffee and the sight of a platter heaped with sandwiches. For the next several minutes it seemed more important to eat than to talk.

Finally Ken said, "Well, our plan for tonight didn't work. We never got to ask our visitors any questions."

"But fortunately theirs didn't work either," Tod pointed out. "At least it didn't work if what they had in mind was burning us out."

Clem swallowed coffee unhappily. "It would have worked if it hadn't rained in the nick of time. That blaze was too much for us. Maybe I shouldn't have discouraged you from goin' to town for help."

Dan shook his head. "No, you were right, Clem. With all of us sticking at it we kept it away from the tents until the rain did come. We couldn't have managed that with one less hand." He grinned. "So they've got you to thank for their scheme falling through. Whoever *they* are," he added.

"Seems likely to me they came in that car you saw earlier tonight, Dan," Clem said.

Dan looked up sharply from his sandwich. "I'd forgotten all about that! You must be right, Clem. You were just saying it was strange a car should be going down that road when--"

"That's right." Clem grinned faintly. "When somethin' interrupted me."

Dan sighed. "Well, there's been plenty of time for them to have left by now. A whole convoy could have driven along that road while we were fighting the fire, and we'd never have noticed."

"I suppose you didn't have time to notice anything about the car?" Ken asked.

"Not a thing," Dan admitted. "It was traveling so fast that it was just a blur of headlights-and then a cloud of dust."

Ken put down his cup. "We don't know who these people are or what they're after. But I suppose tonight ought to prove one thing to us at least: that we're the targets of a campaign to get us out of here. So don't you think we ought to set up a regular guard system from now on? Whoever they are, they don't seem to mind playing pretty rough."

"That," Sandy said, fingering his chin, "is an understatement."

"At least they can't set another fire," Clem said. "There's not enough unburned grass left to make it worth while."

"There's still the tents left to burn," Dan pointed out.

"Now isn't that a cheerful thought!" Tod retorted. "O.K. Here's the way we'll play it from now on. We'll take four-hour shifts. I don't

suppose any of us feel up to doing duty for the next four hours tonight, but—

“I’ll take the first shift,” Ken offered. “So long as I don’t have to exercise a single muscle in my body, I don’t mind. I’m not sleepy.”

“All right, if you really mean it,” Tod said, and when Ken nodded his head, he added, “That’s settled then. And when your shift is up, you call me. I’ll take the next one.”

“There’s just one thing I think we might do before the rest of you turn in,” Ken said, “and that’s to take a good look at Barnes’ house. The man Sandy was chasing was definitely heading in that direction tonight. Isn’t it possible that our friends are using it as a headquarters? It wouldn’t be the first time an empty house was used like that.”

Tod and Dan both looked thoughtful. “That’s an idea,” Dan said finally. “It certainly would be handy for them, wouldn’t it?”

Tod crossed to one of the chests beside the desk and opened it. He brought out two nasty-looking machetes, their broad blades gleaming dully under the coating of a rust-preventing oil. “These are very handy for cutting brush and for protecting yourself against snakes, for example,” he said dryly. He handed one to Clem. “You stay here, Dan,” he added. “One of us ought to be on the spot, and your ankle needs all the rest you can give it.”

Sandy picked up the last half-sandwich on the platter as they walked out into the night, throwing the beams of their flashlights ahead of them onto the wet sandy ground. Together, they made their weary way up the slope of the spit and down the far side. When they reached the Barnes boathouse, Tod sent his light back and forth the full length of the dock, even flashing it underneath to probe the heavy growth of matted grass that almost touched the underside of the timbers.

“Nothing,” he reported. “Let’s have a look inside the boathouse.”

They all pressed their faces against the windows, holding their lights close to the glass to give some illumination in the dusky interior. It was empty.

Ken inspected the lock. Aside from a coating of rust it was in perfect condition-and securely fastened.

Their footsteps sounded loud in the night as they moved in a body up the boardwalk toward the house.

“If there’s anybody up there they can see us coming anyway,” Tod pointed out, “so there’s no need to tiptoe.”

The roofed front porch was dry, unmarred by a single wet footprint. The short flight of steps leading to the back door showed no signs of having been used recently. Every window on the ground floor was locked. The two locked doors showed no evidence of having been forced open.



"That's that, I guess," Tod said finally. "There's no one here and no sign of the place having been broken into." He yawned. "Come on, Clem. I'll drive you home as soon as we get back to camp. We'd be glad to put you up, but I know you want to get out of those wet clothes."

"Thanks," Clem said. "The car'll be a lot quicker than the skiff. I'd have to stop and bail her out before I could use her. But you won't have to drive in for me in the mornin'," he went on, as they all started back down the boardwalk. "I've got a little dinghy I can use."

Tod yawned again. "Don't use it too early. You need a decent night's rest for a change."

While Tod and Clem departed for Claytown in the jeep, and Sandy brought the convertible up from the beach and parked it again near the tents, Dan put a pot of coffee on the stove, in case Ken might want it.

"Thanks," Ken said. "But I'll be all right. I'll sit in the car and listen to the radio." He glanced at his watch. "In fact, I think I'll settle down there right now. It's just time for the three-o'clock newscast. Good night, Dan. 'Night, Sandy. Thanks for bringing the car up."

"Good night," Dan said. He was limping on his bad ankle again as he headed for the sleeping tent.

"Guess I'll listen to the news too before I turn in," Sandy decided, and slid into the front seat of the convertible alongside Ken.

The news program was already underway when Ken dialed in. He turned the volume down low. Suddenly, a minute later, he turned it up slightly.

"The waterfront racket investigators exploded into action late last night," the broadcaster was saying, "following the disappearance of four alleged underworld figures. The four men-Roger Finn, Louis Gorman, Red Davis, and Tex Walters-disappeared after having been served with subpoenas in connection with an investigation of their income-tax returns. It is believed that the grand-jury staff feared the men's flight might touch off a general exodus of men wanted for questioning. Consequently, special police and detective squads swooped down on a dozen places early this morning and picked up more than fifty known criminals suspected of being involved in the waterfront crime ring. Whether or not tonight's raids will help the racket probe is still to be determined, according to Special Prosecutor Mark Haynes, but the fishing expedition has already netted some unexpected prizes. Among those caught in the roundup was Charles McCann, the object of a two-year search on suspicion of having been involved in the daring daytime holdup of the Central Valley Bank, when armed men made off with nearly a million dollars in cash. Three bank employees are now being flown to New York City to confront

McCann, whom they have already identified from a police photograph.”

There was a slight pause and the boys could hear the faint rustle of a page being flipped over. “In the local political arena,” the broadcaster went on, “it is apparent ...”

Ken shut off the radio.

Sandy whistled softly. “That fuss your father started is certainly spreading around, isn’t it?”

“Looks as though it’s well out of his hands by now,” Ken said, with relief in his voice. And then he added, “I wish he could walk out on it altogether and come down here. We could do with a sharper brain than either of us.” He broke off as the jeep’s headlights struck them with blinding brilliance.

When Tod pulled up beside them, he jumped out of the jeep immediately and came over. “A car just passed me,” he said. “Heading for Claytown. I saw the headlights coming and figured it was your car—that maybe something else had happened and you were going for help. So I pulled over to the side of the road and blinked my headlights as a signal. I thought the car was slowing down, and I was all ready to jump out and yell at you, when suddenly it speeded up and whipped past me like a streak.”

The boys didn’t comment for a moment.

“Of course,” Sandy said finally, “now that the rain has stopped and the wind’s gone down, I suppose it could have been some local fishermen who’d gone out to look the beach over and were coming back again.”

“I don’t believe that,” Tod said flatly, “any more than I believed our fire had been started by accident.”

“I don’t either,” Sandy admitted.

“And of course I didn’t see any more of this car than Dan did, earlier this evening,” Tod went on, his voice showing the anger he felt with himself. “All we do is just sit around and let these crazy things happen to us. And we slip up every time we have a chance of finding out what it’s all about.”

Ken didn’t say anything. He, too, was feeling angry with himself. He wished now that he and Sandy hadn’t ever mentioned the fact that they had earned a reputation as detectives, that they had solved some mysteries in the past. They certainly were not doing very well on this one. But it wasn’t only Ken’s pride that was suffering. He’d come to like Tod and Dan—he knew Sandy had too. They both realized how much this dig meant to the archaeologists; how important it was to them to bring it to a successful conclusion, and before their money ran out.

It was Tod himself who finally broke the silence.

“Get along to bed, Sandy,” he said. “I’m going to stay up with Ken. We’re going to stand guard in pairs from now on until we clear this thing up.”

Ken wanted to protest. But what reason had Tod to believe, he asked himself disgustedly, that either he or Sandy was capable of handling any difficulty alone?

# CHAPTER XI

## DIGGING IN VAIN

The whine of an outboard motor awakened Ken out of a sleep troubled by dreams. He sat up suddenly, looked at Sandy's empty bed, and remembered that he and Tod had been relieved of guard duty by Sandy and Dan at seven o'clock. He reached for his wrist watch on the packing case that served as a bedside table. The hands pointed to half-past ten.

Tod's bed was empty, too, Ken noticed through half-open eyes. The sound of the motor had died now, and he heard Sandy's voice calling a greeting to Clem. There was a rattle of pots and pans and suddenly Ken was aware of a wonderful smell of fresh-made coffee. He swung his feet over the edge of his cot.

Tod came in, draped his towel over a nail in the tent pole and began to comb his wet hair. "If you're as sleepy as I was when I woke up five minutes ago, you'll find that cold well water highly beneficial."

"I'm afraid it would take a charge of dynamite to wake me up," Ken said.

But the cold water did the trick. When he joined the others at the table five minutes later, Ken was feeling almost human. His first sips of Dan's strong coffee brought him back to normal.

"You're looking pretty chipper." Sandy grinned at him. "You should have seen what you looked like when you staggered out of the tent a couple of minutes ago."

"And I didn't feel any better than I looked," Ken told him. He helped himself to eggs. "Any sign of trouble after Tod and I turned in this morning?"

"Nothing," Dan answered. "And from what Clem's just reported it seems possible our friends have given us up for greener pastures. He says somebody broke open the door of the inn last night."

Clem, pouring coffee for himself, responded to Ken's questioning look. "That's right. Didn't take anythin' apparently, but there's no doubt the lock was broken."

"Isn't that door always open? It was the night we arrived," Ken said.

"I asked them to leave it open that night because I was expecting you," Tod put in. "They usually lock up about eleven."

Clem brought his coffee to the table. "The county police are at the inn now, lookin' for clues." He grinned faintly. "Ever since Chet Hinds-he's the chief-caught the kids who were stealin' his apples a

couple of years back he thinks he's a combination of the FBI and Scotland Yard. But far as I can tell, there aren't any clues to find-just the door broken open and that's all."

Tod looked at Dan. "What made you say it might be the work of our friends?"

"It was a completely unscientific deduction," Dan admitted cheerfully. "I was just trying to convince you and myself that the mysterious visitors we've had around here no longer had any interest in us."

"It does sound like the same kind of pointless hit-and-run technique we've had around here," Ken said tentatively. "Breaking open the inn door and leaving without stealing anything makes about as much sense as the galloping ghost and spying on the dig here, and setting a fire and then disappearing again."

Tod grinned. "If you're going to lump together all the people in the world who do pointless things, we'll have quite a list of suspects." He reached for more toast. "My suggestion is that for today we try to forget the whole business and concentrate on our job. We're going to start digging this morning, and if I've got anything to say about it, we'll keep on digging until we find what we're looking for or until we're convinced it's not here."

He looked at the boys, still with the same air of determined cheerfulness. "We can't expect to keep you two around here much longer, and I mean to get all the work I can out of you before you go."

"Aye, aye, sir. Bring on the shovels," Sandy said.

Sandy was right, Ken thought. As detectives they had accomplished nothing. As shovel wielders they still had a chance to be of some use to Tod and Dan. "Just show us where to dig," he said. "I guess Bert told you we've got strong backs even if we do have weak minds."

"Shucks!" Clem put his coffee cup down with a clatter. "I almost forgot to tell you, Ken. Your father called up early this mornin'." At Ken's quick questioning glance he hurried on. "Said he was fine and wanted to know how you two were. No, he doesn't want you to call him back. Just left you a message-to listen to the twelve-o'clock news broadcast from New York or Philadelphia."

Ken looked at his watch. "That's not for another forty-five minutes yet. Thanks, Clem. And he really sounded fine?"

"Even after you told him we were nearly burned up out here last night?" Sandy asked.

The creases in Clem's face deepened. "I do declare," he said, "that slipped my mind entirely."

"I'll bet it did." Ken grinned at him. "Thanks, Clem. Dad's got enough on his mind right now without thinking we're on the verge of being roasted alive."

Clem winked. "That's what I figured. We're all safe and sound. No use gettin' your folks all fussed over somethin' that's already over."

"This is the most talkative gang I ever had." Tod picked up a shovel and thrust it toward Sandy. "Here. Take off!"

A few minutes later they were all gathered around the first stake—the one close to the creek, marking what Tod hoped was the spot where the road began on the east bank. Tod took a ball of twine from his pocket and tied the loose end to the stake. He handed the ball to Ken.

"Run it up to the other stake near the tents and tie it," he said. "Pull it taut. We'll start our digging right along the cord."

They all watched him run the line up and tie it. As Ken started back, Sandy asked, "What will we be looking for? Cobblestones?"

Dan frowned with mock severity. "Are you really ignorant enough to believe they built cobblestone roads in the wilderness three hundred years ago?"

"Well, what did they build them out of?" Sandy persisted.

"Did you ever hear of corduroy?"

Ken, coming close enough to hear, said, "Sure. I've got a pair of corduroy pants. But why-?"

Sandy broke in, just as Dan was throwing up his hands with a despairing gesture. "I remember now. It's a road made of logs laid side by side, with a layer of dirt over them."

"Well!" Dan looked happily amazed. "So you do know something, after all!"

"As a matter of fact, we're not really sure that there was ever a corduroy road here," Tod put in. "But we believe there might have been at least a short stretch of it, near the water's edge, to give a solid footing for horses. So this is where we'll look for traces of it—down here."

He sighted up the length of line Ken had just stretched. "Well, here goes!" he said. "This line follows the route of the road, we hope. So we'll dig at intervals along it. I'll make the first test dig right here at the stake. Dan, you take a spot ten paces along. Clem can go ten paces beyond you, and you boys take the next two positions."

They all picked up their shovels. There was a feeling of tense expectancy in the sunny morning air, still cool with the freshness of the previous night's storm.

"Don't dig wildly," Dan warned. "You never can tell when you'll strike something, and we don't want our evidence smashed up. If you hit anything that looks like a log, sing out."

"Do you want just a round hole?" Sandy asked.

"No, we'll make slit trenches about shovel width, and running about five feet away from the line, in both directions," Tod directed.

"And how deep?" Ken asked.

"About two feet, I should think," Tod said. "But we can't tell yet. We don't know how much silt and debris has been deposited here in three centuries."

Five shovels plunged into the yielding sand at almost the same moment, at regular intervals along the line.

The digging wasn't hard. Even when they called a halt shortly after they had started, in order to listen to the news, they had made considerable progress. But they were all glad of the excuse to walk up to the tents and sit down in comfort for the broadcast. The news item they were interested in came almost immediately.

"The waterfront racket investigation," the announcer said, "increased in scope this morning when a two-year-old bank robbery was attributed to the same crime syndicate allegedly responsible for the protection rackets along New York City docks and piers. According to Special Prosecutor Mark Haynes, three witnesses have definitely identified Charles McCann, arrested during yesterday's police raids, as one of the three hoodlums who held up the Central Valley Bank in broad daylight two years ago. McCann is reported as having said, 'I'll blow the whole crime ring wide open.' He accused Red Davis and Tex Walters of having planned the bank robbery, and declared these same two men also ranked as leaders among the waterfront protection racketeers. Two others he named are Louis Gorman and Roger Finn. These four men-Davis, Walters, Gorman, and Finn-are currently being sought by the police. They disappeared yesterday after being subpoenaed by a Federal grand jury for questioning on their income-tax returns.

"McCann claimed that he and his two associates-whom so far he has refused to name-received one hundred thousand dollars for their work, after having turned over the million-dollar bank haul to Davis and Walters. 'But,' police quoted McCann as saying, 'if the big boys are running out, I'm not going to stick my neck out to protect them.' He claimed to know nothing of the present whereabouts of the stolen money. FBI officials state that none of the larger bills-the numbers of which were recorded-have ever turned up, despite persistent search."

Ken took a step closer to the radio as he realized that the announcer was still not finished.

"The current widespread hunt for Davis, Walters, Gorman, and Finn has been stepped up following Mc-Cann's disclosures," the smooth voice went on. "These four men are believed to be the only ones who can identify the top leader, or leaders, of the organized crime ring. So far no clues as to their whereabouts have appeared. But Federal men yesterday swooped down on a swank Philadelphia yacht club and seized a sixty-foot luxury boat belonging to Red Davis.

According to the club's officials, the yacht was completely fueled and stocked with supplies during the past twenty-four hours. They estimated that the boat could cruise for at least a week without returning to land, and police suspect that it was being readied for a getaway. The yacht's crew is being held pending further investigation of their assertion that they are merely hired hands of the owner and completely ignorant as to the owner's plans. 'He telephoned and told me to stock up for a cruise,' the captain is reported as saying. 'And when I asked him where we were going, he said he'd phone me again to let me know his plans.'"

Ken had been listening intently, trying to understand the full significance of the announcer's words and wondering if the police had further information that they were not yet releasing.

"Looks as though the rats are deserting the ship," he said, as he flicked off the switch. "If McCann is really going to talk, that sounds like a good break for the investigation." And then, to his own surprise, he found himself adding, "But you know, I'll be more excited if we find a splinter today than if the police find Roger Finn and his pals."

Tod and Dan both grinned.

"Maybe we should have warned you," Dan said, "that this digging stuff can really get you. Especially the first day," he added. "But you have to be really lost to the cause to go on being excited when you've dug for about two months and still haven't found a thing."

Tod groaned. "Don't talk like that! If we don't find anything in two months here, we won't be lost to the cause—we'll just be plain lost."

The work went more slowly after their break. The wet sand that they encountered several inches below the surface was heavier to handle. And the deeper they dug the more carefully they moved, to make sure they didn't unwittingly drive through a piece of rotted log and continue below without having realized that they had already passed their goal.

Tod periodically made the rounds of the various trenches, sifting the dug sand in his fingers. When he called a halt for a breather, and a drink of water from the bucket Sandy had brought down, there was a worried crease in his forehead. "You're all down about two feet now," he said, "and I don't suppose it makes sense to go more than another six inches. If we haven't found anything by then ..."

He didn't finish the sentence. When they picked up their shovels again they didn't know what Tod's next plan would be if they still failed to find anything by the time they'd reached a depth of two and a half feet.

And they did fail.

"Another six inches?" Dan suggested tentatively.

Tod shook his head. "I don't think it would do any good." There



was a tight line around his mouth. He studied the map again. "I don't see where we could have gone wrong," he said. "Unless, of course, the original of this map was never accurate anyway. But if that's so, we don't stand a chance." He let the map roll up with a snap.

"We won't even consider that possibility," Dan said firmly. "We've got to trust the map. But cheer up, Tod, we've hardly begun."

"I know," Tod said. "But it isn't as if we were looking for something small. We're looking for a road, man! And it must have been at least ten or fifteen feet wide. I don't see how-" He broke off. "Of course," he added, "there may never have been any corduroy paving. In that case there'd be nothing for us to find."

Ken and Sandy looked at each other, wishing they could help and knowing there was nothing they could do. Clem stared unhappily down at the shovel he had been wielding so steadily.

"All right," Tod said suddenly. "Let's take a break for lunch now. Afterward, we'll lengthen the trenches, make them another five feet longer in each direction."

"Right," Dan agreed, "That'll give us a span of twenty feet. We certainly ought to run into the road somewhere along in there, if there ever was a road around here at all."

While they ate a lunch of sandwiches and milk they discussed the possibility of abandoning the idea of looking for the road at all, if they saw no signs of it in the new longer trenches they planned to dig. But Tod and Dan agreed that to search for the site of the inn instead, without the road to guide them, would be an enormous task.

"It would be sheer luck if we found it that way," Tod said. "And we haven't the time or the money to leave this whole thing to luck."

They had had a late lunch. It was well past midaf ternoon by the time they had all lengthened their trenches. And they still had found no trace of buried logs to indicate the presence of a corduroy road.

Tod prowled up and down the line, fingering handfuls of sand along the bottom and the walls of each slitlike hole.

"Nothing!" he murmured. "Absolutely nothing!"

"Maybe we couldn't find it by touch," Dan offered. "If the wood has rotted away, we might miss the feel of it. Let's sift some of the stuff out." He brought a pair of sifting screens to Clem's trench, which Tod was just then exploring. "You three might as well take a rest," he added, "while we cast our expert eyes over this."

Clem said, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "Good. I was just wonderin' when you'd give me a chance to bail the skiff out."

Ken and Sandy sat down side by side on the big boulder, out of earshot of the two archaeologists.

"You'd think we'd at least have found some pirate gold by now!" Sandy muttered.

"I don't think Tod would settle for pirate gold," Ken said with a wry smile. "He wants a glasshouse-and to find it he needs to find the road."

"I've got an idea!" Sandy sat up straight. "Maybe if they looked for the road on the other side of the creek, and found it there, they'd be able to figure-"

Ken was shaking his head. "Tod was talking about that possibility earlier. It seems there's nothing at all over there to give them even a hint, nothing like this rock, that they could figure from."

"Oh." Sandy slumped back. "If there were a lot of rocks around here," he said a moment later, "they might have made a mistake and not chosen the right rock to figure from. But I guess this is the only one."

Ken grabbed his arm. "What's that?" He was pointing northward toward the spit, but in a direction slightly away from the creek. "That dark thing buried in the grass."

"It looks like-!" Sandy jumped up. "Like another rock!" He turned as if to shout to Tod and Dan, but Ken stopped him.

"Let's make sure it is a rock first, before we mention it to them," Ken said.

They counted the paces as they walked toward it. Before they had covered half the distance they could see that the thing they were heading for was in fact a boulder, almost as large as the other one but buried so deeply that it was barely visible in the reedlike grass.

"Ninety-seven paces," Ken said. "And if they'd measured from here-"

Tod's shout made them turn around. "We know about that rock, if that's what you're doing over there," he called.

Dispiritedly the boys made their way back to Tod and Dan.

"You're getting as smart at this as we are, which isn't saying much," Dan congratulated them. He went on to explain why they had known the second rock could not be the one indicated on the map. "It's almost sixty-five feet from the water," he pointed out, "which means it could never have been in the creek, as this one was when the map was drawn. And besides, if you measure two hundred and fifty feet north of that one, you're almost at the spit-and the map shows the road as being some distance south of the spit."

Clem came up from the creek. Dan shook his head at him.

"I hardly think you'd find the logs rotted, anyway," Clem said, almost apologetically. "If we find them at all, I think they'll be solid. Buried logs last almost forever around here."

Dan looked at Tod. "Well, what do you think we ought to try next? Of course we might dig one big trench, parallel to the creek. Make it a couple of hundred feet long perhaps. We'd certainly cross the road

then, if it ever existed.”

Tod frowned. Dan’s suggestion meant an enormous amount of work.

“Why not lengthen the ones we’ve already got?” Ken suggested. “Another two and a half feet each way would make them twenty-five feet long.”

“All right,” Tod decided. “If you’re game.”

“Sure we are.”

Once more they picked up their shovels. But when they finally dropped them again, much later, tired, hot, and aching in every muscle, they had still found nothing whatsoever to show that there had ever been a road running inland from the creek at the old ferry site.

## CHAPTER XII

### UNEXPLAINED MISTAKE

Tod drove his shovel deep into the pile of earth and left it there while he mopped the perspiration from his face with an already soaked handkerchief. For a moment he looked angrily up toward the other trenches, and then he climbed up out of his own ditch.

"All right," he said. "Let's call it a day. I'm not even sure there's any point in going on tomorrow," he added.

Dan shook his head. "I know you too well to pay any attention to you, Tod. Let's just catch our breath for a minute and then go over everything methodically. If we've slipped up somewhere in our calculations, maybe we can find out where."

Clem grinned. "I always claim it's a good idea to stop and take stock."

"I suppose you're right." Tod was no longer glaring, but he still looked dispirited. "Let's take it step by step then. Dan, you agree that as nearly as we can figure the road should be two hundred and fifty feet due north of that boulder?"

"Check."

"Do you also agree-?"

"Hold it, Tod." Dan stood up. "If we're going to check, let's do it right. How do I know you were pointed due north?"

"If I can't handle a transit after all these years-" Tod cut himself short and grinned. "You're right. We'll check."

Dan set the instrument up this time, leveling it carefully and sighting in line with the compass needle.

"Right," he reported. "The stake up there is due north of the boulder. Now where's the measuring tape?"

"Ken and I measured the distance together," Sandy pointed out. "So that part ought to be-" Then he, too, broke off, as Tod had done.

Dan grinned at him. "Nobody's doubting anybody's ability or accuracy," he reminded him. "We're just doing it all over. Clem and I will do it this time."

"Sure. We know," Sandy assured him.

Dan held the spool of the steel measuring tape close to the stake beneath the transit and Clem walked off, unreeling the tape as he went. When it was all unwound he stopped and held the end on the ground until Dan joined him.

"One length," Dan said. "Four more to go."

He called them off as they moved toward the trenches.

"Two lengths... . Three lengths... . Four lengths."

Suddenly Tod and the boys, sitting on the boulder, were galvanized by a shout.

"Hey! Come here!" Dan called.

"What?" Tod called out, running forward.

Ken felt a warning sinking feeling in the stomach. Was it possible that he and Sandy together had-?

"The measurement's wrong," Dan announced, confirming Ken's fear. "It's off by twenty-two feet."

Tod gaped at him. "Twenty-two feet!"

"It can't be!" Sandy gasped.

"Well, it is," Dan said firmly. "Clem is standing where the stake should be-two hundred and fifty feet north of the rock. And look where the stake is-only two twenty-eight from the rock. No wonder we didn't find any signs of a road!"

Ken would have been delighted if the earth had opened and swallowed him. But he couldn't understand how the error had occurred. "Tod watched us run out five lengths of the tape," he said quietly. "We went to the end each time. We certainly didn't stop twenty-eight feet along the last length or any other length. So I don't see how-"

Tod clapped him on the shoulder. All his discouragement had fled. His eyes were alight with excitement again. "I thought I saw you measure five lengths-and you think you did it," he said. "So it turns out we were all wrong. But cheer up. Those things happen. The important thing is we now have another chance to locate the road."

He jerked the stake out of the ground and ran with it to the spot Clem was marking. There he plunged it into the ground again. Like a cheerful general he barked out his orders.

"Bring the transit over here, Sandy, so we can sight a new line. And, Ken, you get the shovels on the spot."

Tod's swift pace paused for a moment when he discovered that the stake driven between the two tents-the stake that had formed the upper terminus of their line-was apparently in precisely the right spot, as sighted from the newly driven stake.

"How did that happen?" he muttered. And then he shrugged. "Well, I guess we were all off the beam yesterday. If I'd sighted this correctly from the other stake, it would have been-" With an effort he gave up the whole problem. "Never mind. So long as we do it right this time. Here, Dan, you'd better check this sight too."

A few minutes later Tod was saying to Dan, "All right. Go ahead. You spotted the error, so you get to dig the first hole."

Dan sighed with mock resignation. "If I'd known my reward would be permission to dig another hole I might not have been so smart." He reached for a shovel.

“By rights *I* ought to dig this one and all the holes from now on,” Ken said. “I was responsible for-“

“Forget it,” Dan interrupted. “As Tod told you, those things happen. Even in the best-managed digs. Well, let’s see. I think it would be tempting fate to dig right where the stake is.” He gazed around, as if waiting for inspiration to strike him. “I shall dig,” Dan said then, in a pompous ceremonial voice, “exactly fifteen feet above the stake.”

He paced the distance off, drove his shovel into the earth at that spot, and put his weight on it.

For a moment they all stood watching him, and then they too picked up shovels and moved along the line to positions similar to those they had taken along the earlier marker. For several minutes they worked in silence.

When Dan suddenly caught his breath, they all heard the sound and stopped. The dark-haired young archaeologist was sifting soil between his fingers. “Thought I felt something solid,” he murmured.

As if pulled by strings they all gathered around him.

“It could be,” Dan said quietly. He held out his palm. On it lay a small piece of wood. “It could be.” He stepped out of the trench and handed his shovel to Tod. “This project is your brain child. Go ahead. Dig up the first evidence.”

Tod hesitated only for a moment. Then, with a faint nervous grin, he took Dan’s place and cautiously sliced away a new segment of sandy soil. And then one more.

His shovel struck something more solid than sand, and Tod laid the tool aside. With hands that trembled a little he began to push the sand aside almost grain by grain.

The others were bending over the trench, scarcely breathing.

“Got it!” Tod’s voice was a hushed whisper. “Got it!”

And then they could all see it—a length of wet soggy timber that had once, unmistakably, been a fresh-cut log.

Tod touched it with a thumb that moved reverently. “You’re seeing something men laid down here nearly three centuries ago.”

Dan was crouched beside him now, and he too was carefully removing more sand, a pinch at a time. Almost immediately they could see that a second log lay alongside the first.

“That clinches it,” Dan murmured. “This is really it!”

He and Tod looked at each other, and then they solemnly shook hands.

“Congratulations!” Ken and Sandy said the word simultaneously.

Tod glanced up at them. “Of course this is just the beginning.”

“Well, that’s the best place to start,” Clem said dryly. And then he grinned, “I’m sure mighty pleased for you two.”

"You're pleased!" Tod's carefree laugh was the first that day. "I feel as if somebody had just given me a million dollars. No, I don't," he contradicted himself. "No amount of money could be this exciting. Come on, Dan. Let's have a bang-up meal to celebrate. We've done a good day's work."

"A good half-hour's work, you mean," Ken corrected him. "Most of the day was wasted because—"

"Cut it out!" Tod punched him lightly on the arm. "Every dig has a certain amount of hard luck. We've just been smart enough to get ours out of the way early. How about it, Dan? What's for supper?"

Dan was grinning helplessly. "Supper will really wind up our hard luck," he said. "We forgot to go shopping. So all we've got is some canned hash. And I was planning to ask you to stay and celebrate with us, Clem," he added apologetically.

"Don't worry." Clem winked at the boys. "A good guest always comes provided."

"You mean provided he doesn't know he's going to get hash?" Sandy suggested.

Dan gave him a pained look. Then he said, "What did you mean, Clem? Have you got a deep freeze in that skiff of yours?"

"I don't need one," Clem told him. "There's plenty of stuff for supper all around the skiff, if you like fresh fluke, that is."

"Like it!" Dan's eyes lit up. "Can you guarantee to catch some though?"

"Just about. Anyway, I think it's safe for you to put up a pot of potatoes. Comin', boys?" Clem looked at Sandy and Ken.

Tod was beaming at everybody in turn. "Sounds great. I'll just do a little more digging in the meantime, just to see how long these logs are," he added hurriedly as Dan laughed.

Clem led his two willing assistants down to the skiff. Moored alongside it was the dinghy in which he had come to the dig that morning—a small, light blunt-ended boat little more than half the size of the skiff, with an outboard motor clamped to her stern.

Clem lifted a minnow trap out of the dinghy's prow, baited it with a piece of bread, and in five minutes showed them a dozen bright minnows. "Let's go," he said. "We'll take the skiff, I guess. She's roomier for three."

He waited until the boys were seated on the broad rear seat and then he shoved the skiff clear of the beach and pushed her out into the creek with an oar. "Can you run an outboard?" he asked Sandy.

"Sure. We use one on a lake near Brentwood." At Clem's gesture of command Sandy prepared to start the motor. "This is the same make as the one we use, except that ours is only a little three-horsepower job and yours is a seven."

“Three horsepower is what the dinghy’s got,” Clem told them, reaching for some lines. Already the tide was carrying them slowly downstream. “All right. You can start the motor now. Head her upstream. We’ll stop after a bit and drift back with the current. That’s the best way to fish for fluke. With luck, we’ll have enough fish by the time we get back to camp.”

“Luck?” Sandy laughed. “Sure you don’t mean a miracle?”

But Clem’s prediction proved accurate after all. By the time the skiff had drifted to a point opposite the camp, Clem was saying, “Well, we’ve done our job. Now if those potatoes were put up in time we ought to be eatin’ pretty soon.”

Dinner that night was a silent meal. A complete and respectful silence, Dan said, after his first mouthful of golden fried fish, was the only fitting tribute to such food.

“Even if I had anything I wanted to say,” Sandy murmured, “I wouldn’t want to waste time talking now.”

Because none of them was speaking they heard the throb of the motor long before the boat came in sight. Clem identified the sound first, when it was little more than a quiver in the air to the others’ ears.

“Big boat,” he said. “Still a way off. Probably be fifteen minutes before we see her.”

He was right almost to the minute. They had finished eating and were sitting over the first cup of coffee when the craft edged its way around the creek bend and hove into view.

Clem nodded. “Just as I figured. That’s Barnes’ *Kingfisher*. A real beauty, she is. Forty-foot from stem to stern, and every inch kept shipshape. Hawkins—that’s John Hawkins, her captain—keeps her in good trim.”

They all walked down to the creek to see her go past. The *Kingfishers* hull was black but the superstructure was a gleaming white. The sun glinted from the polished brass of the engine controls.

Clem waved. “Ahoy, *Kingfisher*!” And when the man on the flying bridge, silhouetted against the sky, waved back, Clem added, “How are you, John?”

“Fine, Clem!” a voice called across the water. “How are you?”

The group on the bank could hear the voice, lowered a notch, add, “There’s Clem Locum, Mr. Barnes—over there on the beach.”

None of them had noticed the plump white-haired figure of Barnes until he got up from a deck chair and came to the rail. Then he waved cheerfully and Hawkins throttled the *Kingfishers* engine down as Clem performed long-distance introductions.

“Glad to know you all!” Barnes called. “What are you doing over there. Digging for worms?” He leaned forward over the rail to point at



the slit trenches.

"Diggin' for ruins, Mr. Barnes," Clem told him. "These fellows are archaeologists."

"Archaeologists, eh? In that case you'd better come up and call on me at the lodge. Its foundation is supposed to be at least two hundred years old."

"I'd like to very much!" Tod answered him. "Been trying to reach you, in fact, to ask if I could look at the place."

"Fine! Why don't you come tonight? Give us a chance to get acquainted, at least," Barnes said. "Suit you all right to make it in about an hour?"

"Suits us fine," Tod assured him. "We'll be there. Thanks!"

They all waved again and then the *Kingfisher's* engines throbbed more loudly and the craft moved on upstream, swinging wide toward the far bank to make the turn around the spit.

"Seems like a decent sort," Dan said, as they all walked slowly back up to the tents. "Hope he settles down at the lodge for a couple of weeks, at least. That ought to keep the snoopers away."

Tod threw an arm over Dan's shoulders. "The way I feel right now," he said, "with our road located, and with a good meal inside of me, and with the prospects of looking over Barnes' place-just to add a final touch to the day-even the thought of snoopers and galloping ghosts couldn't irritate me."

Sandy moved closer to Ken and spoke in a low voice. "I'm plenty irritated," he said. "We've made some pretty stupid mistakes in our lives, but we never before did anything quite so stupid as measuring twenty-two feet short on a two-hundred-and-fifty-foot distance. I just can't believe we did it!"

Ken kept his voice down too. "I feel the same way," he murmured. "I just can't believe we did it, either. But how did the stake get in the wrong place then?"

"Exactly," Sandy said. "How?"

## CHAPTER XIII

### STRANGE FISHERMEN

They had no further chance to discuss the question of the faulty measurement just then. By the time they reached the tents they found Tod and Dan urging Clem to leave for Claytown immediately.

"I remember you saying you play chess with a friend of yours every week," Dan was saying. "There's absolutely no reason for you to skip it tonight."

"But you four took turns standing guard last night," Clem pointed out. "Seems to me it's about time for me to do my share."

"Nonsense! You do more than your share around here every minute of the day," Tod told him. "Maybe we won't even bother to stand guard tonight," he added. "The way I feel right now, I'm convinced our troubles are over-if they ever really existed. Maybe we've just been imagining that somebody has had it in for us."

Dan looked skeptical. "You're certainly either way up or way down in the dumps, aren't you, Tod? Personally, I think there ought to be at least one open eye on our tents tonight, but I don't think it ought to be yours, Clem. So you get along, and right now. You're probably already late."

"You don't think I ought to stay here with Ken and Sandy while you two are at Barnes'?"

"Sir!" Sandy drew himself up to his full height and flexed his arms and his chest muscles. "I resent that! Alone and unaided, Ken and I could hold off any marauding force smaller than an army!"

They all laughed. "I may stay with them myself, just on the chance of witnessing that feat," Dan told Clem. "Besides, Tod knows I don't like these gabfests with millionaires who own antiquities. So you keep your date, Clem."

"Dan, you don't mean you won't come to Barnes', do you?" Tod said.

"We'll see. I don't really enjoy that kind of stuff, Tod."

Ken wondered if Dan were telling the truth. Perhaps, after yesterday's mistake, Dan didn't trust them to notice marauders, let alone to keep them away from the tents. He wished that he and Sandy could get off alone and really put their heads together over that apparent error.

As they all started down to the creek to see Clem off, Ken said, "Do you mind if Sandy and I drive into town and make one more call to Global News? I've been wondering if Dad's in Philadelphia, or where he is. We'll be right back."

“Of course not. You’re probably just trying to get out of doing the dishes but go ahead.” Tod grinned at them.

“Want to take the dinghy?” Clem asked.

“Say! That would be great!” Sandy beamed.

Ken tried to catch his eye and shake his head, but the redhead wasn’t looking in his direction. “The car would be faster,” Ken said.

“Oh, the dinghy can make it to town and back in under an hour,” Clem assured them. He smiled at Sandy. “I can see you’ve got a real feelin’ for boats.”

“I’m crazy about them,” Sandy admitted. “And I’d like to see what kind of speed that dinghy makes with a three-horsepower motor.”

“You’ll see, all right.” Clem grinned proudly. “Sometimes I half expect her to take right off and fly.”

Ken gave up. He should have remembered the way Sandy felt about boats, he told himself.

Clem made certain Sandy knew what he was doing, and then got in his skiff and started off. Sandy gunned the dinghy’s little motor to life and followed in his wake. Dan and Tod waved to them from the beach and then turned to walk back up to the tents.

It was impossible to talk over the noise of the motor. Ken knew that if he said anything in a voice loud enough for Sandy to hear, he would also be heard for several hundred yards on either side of the creek. And, he added to himself as they rounded the spit, by the fishermen in the boat drifting with the current just ahead.

He saw Clem lift his hand in friendly greeting, and he and Sandy both waved too. The fishermen bobbed their heads in return.

That was certainly one nice thing about boats, Ken told himself. They invariably made strangers friendly to each other. And Sandy hadn’t had so much fun for days. Ken shrugged and relaxed finally, leaning forward in his seat in the bow to watch the way the little dinghy sped through the water.

Clem reached town ahead of them, of course. He was already getting himself “slicked up a little,” as he called it, when they pushed open the screen door into his kitchen.

“That you boys?” he called down. “Make yourselves at home.”

Ken got his call through quickly, but his father wasn’t in the office. Granger came on the wire instead.

“Ken?” Granger’s voice, as usual, almost shattered the instrument. Sandy, seated across the room, showed by his grin that he could hear him perfectly. “How many of these danged reverse-charge calls do you expect me to accept, anyway?” the New York City news manager boomed.

Ken grinned too, but he didn’t bother to answer. The mock feud that Granger kept alive between himself and the boys had long been a

part of their relationship.

"Where's Dad?" Ken asked.

"In Philadelphia. He and Golden are both taking a rest cure down there, so far as I can discover. Haven't had a line of copy from him in the last six hours!"

Ken grinned again. "He certainly must be having quite a vacation," he agreed. And then he added, "Maybe there's nothing to write copy about."

"There isn't-that's the trouble," Granger growled.

"No sign of those four men yet?" Ken asked.

"Not a sign. The police have cleared the crew of that fancy cruiser that belongs to Red Davis, and that's all they have done. Your father hasn't dug up any new clues either."

"And naturally you expect him to do what the police can't," Ken said.

"Naturally! Why do you think I hire him? But if I don't get some hot news from him pretty soon I'd even be willing to look favorably on one of those screwy yarns you kids keep sending me." He dropped his voice to a tone of exaggerated good humor. "Say! Maybe that's why you're letting me pay for another phone call! You've dug up something you fondly believe is a news item. Have you?"

Ken hesitated. For a moment he was tempted to tell Granger about the curious things that had been happening at the dig. But as he thought them over he realized they added up to almost nothing. And Granger was in no mood to ponder over a list of minor mysteries, each of which would sound in the bare telling-trivial and unexciting.

"I hope not," Ken said finally.

"You hope not!" Granger roared again. "Now there speaks a true newspaperman: he hopes he hasn't got a story! And I pay to hear him tell me that! Get off this wire!" His voice suddenly lowered to a perfectly normal tone. "Sit tight, Ken. Your father's all right. And you know I'd keep you informed if he weren't."

He had rung off before Ken could say good-by.

Ken shook his head. "No wonder Dad wouldn't work for any other news agency in the world!"

Sandy was looking at his watch. "Clem left while you were talking," he said. "We'd better get back."

"Look," Ken said, "the chief reason I wanted to come to town tonight was to get a chance to talk to you in the car. I thought maybe if we put our minds to it we could figure out some explanation of that twenty-two-foot business."

"Oh! Well, why didn't you say so? We can't do much talking over an outboard motor."

"We certainly can't. But short of twisting your arm, I don't see how

I could have kept you out of the dinghy. I tried to shake my head at you-but no, you were too excited at the prospect of running the boat."

Sandy looked sheepish. "I guess it did put everything else out of my mind for a minute." As they walked through Clem's kitchen and down toward his little dock, he went on, "I'd like to have a session on that problem too, though I don't seem to have any ideas on it. Have you?"

"No, I haven't," Ken admitted. "Do you think Dan is going to stay at camp with us while Tod goes to Mr. Barnes' place? If he doesn't, we can do some figuring then."

"I don't know whether he really doesn't want to go to Mr. Barnes', or whether he doesn't trust us to guard the camp alone," Sandy said.

"I don't either." Ken grinned wryly. "What was the name of that school you once thought we ought to start? The Allen-Holt School of How Not to Be Detectives?"

"Something like that." Sandy started the motor with a jerk. "Still sounds like a good idea," he shouted over the motor's roar.

They didn't try to talk after that. The little dinghy moved quickly along and soon they were again at the point where the two fishermen sat quietly, lines dragging-

Sandy automatically waved again. "Any luck?" he called.

One of the fishermen merely shook his head morosely. The other waved and shouted "Nothing at all!"

But Ken and Sandy scarcely noticed his words. Their eyes met in a brief startled flash and then they both looked away, as if afraid the meeting of their glances might reveal their thoughts.

The hand that had waved at them was missing two fingers.

They didn't dare speak until Sandy ran the dinghy up on the beach below the camp and cut the motor.

"Did you notice it too?" he asked then.

Ken nodded. "Looks like you were right about that being a handprint up on the hill."

"What do we do now?" Sandy asked. "If that's the man who was lying up there spying down on us, and he's still in the neighborhood--"

"Let's go tell Dan and Tod about it," Ken said, "and see what they think."

They went up to the tents almost at a run.

"Maybe we're really on the track of something at last," Ken said.

"Let's hope so," Sandy answered. "It's certainly about time!"

Tod's reaction was almost exactly what it had been when Sandy had first pointed to that blurred depression in the sand and declared it to be the print of a hand.

"It's too farfetched," he said. "I didn't really think that was a handprint in the first place. And I can't see anything mysterious about

some Claytown fisherman having lost two fingers. It happens to lots of people.”

But Dan looked thoughtful. “Too bad you didn’t notice the missing fingers on the way to town,” he said. “Then you might have asked Clem if he knew the men.”

“We’ll ask him in the morning,” Tom said, “and I’m willing to bet he’ll say they’re both old friends of his. In fact, if they were strangers, he probably would have mentioned the fact.”

“Not necessarily,” Dan said. “There’s a place in the village that rents out boats to visiting fishermen. If it was one of those boats, Clem wouldn’t have been surprised to see strangers in it. Do you remember what kind of boat it was?”

Ken shut his eyes for a moment to concentrate. “All white,” he said then. “With the name *Joe’s* on it in black letters, and a number.”

Dan nodded. “That’s the place, all right. ‘Joe’s Fishing Camp,’ the owner calls it. He’s got about a dozen boats that he rents out and half a dozen cabins that out-of-town fishermen use when they spend the night.”

“You see?” Tod said. “Your mysterious strangers are probably tired businessmen from Trenton or Philadelphia, perfectly harmless characters. Come on, Dan. It’s time to get over to Barnes’ place. You ready?”

“Wait a minute, Tod,” Dan said, still looking at the boys. “Have you thought of any way we could check up on those men tonight?” he asked them.

“I suppose we might go to that fishing camp and ask a couple of questions,” Ken said tentatively. “The answers might not tell us anything, of course, but-“

“But you think it’s worth a try?” Dan asked.

Ken and Sandy both nodded.

“So do I,” Dan decided. “Go ahead, Tod. You take off for Barnes’ place and I’ll wait here until the boys get back. Then I’ll join you.” At Tod’s indignant protest he stood firm. “You won’t even notice whether I’m there or not if Barnes lets you take a look at some old stones in his cellar. Now go on.”

The boys found Joe’s Fishing Camp with no difficulty. It was not far from Clem’s house, but on the opposite shore of the creek-a row of tiny, almost primitive overnight cabins, a dozen rowboats in a neat row along the beach, and a small shack that apparently served as an office. The round-faced man seated on a wooden bench in front of it was mending a crab net, but he looked up as the boys approached him as if he welcomed interruptions.

“Good evening,” Ken said.

“Evening,” the man replied. “If you’re looking for Joe, you’ve

found him. Want some bait? Or want to rent a boat?"

"Neither," Ken admitted. "We just wanted to ask you a question. We were out on the creek a little while ago and saw two men in one of your boats. After we'd passed them, I began to wonder if one of the men might be a Mr.-uh-" hastily Ken snatched a name out of the air-"a Mr. Robertson of Philadelphia."

"Nope. Guess not," Joe said briefly. "Only got one boat out right now, and the men in it come from New York. Don't recall their names. Can't keep track of all the folks that come and go here, but do remember where these folks come from."

Ken tried again. "Mr. Robertson might have said he came from New York." He improvised further. "He does have an office there, in fact."

Joe put down the crab net and got to his feet. "Well, we can look at the register, if you want to."

"Thanks." Ken smiled.

There was scarcely room for the three of them inside the shack, which contained only a bare table and a single straight-backed chair. Joe pulled open a drawer in the table and took out a thin book. As the man turned its pages, Ken made an effort to keep the conversation going.

"Robertson's a great fisherman," he said. "I guess that's one reason why I thought-"

Joe was shaking his head. He turned the book around so that the boys could read the two lines his finger indicated.

Ken repeated the names aloud. "Robert Wolf and Tom Jones-both of 936 West Forty-sixth Street." He shook his head as if in regret. "My mistake. Sorry we bothered you."

"No bother," Joe assured him. Then he grinned. "Knew as soon as you said your friend was a great fisherman that you were most likely on the wrong track."

"Why?" Ken tried to sound as if his curiosity were merely polite. "Don't Mr. Wolf and Mr. Jones like fishing?"

Joe's round face was crinkled with inner laughter. "Maybe they think they do," he said, "but they don't have what I call the marks of true fishermen. They pulled in here at four o'clock this morning-about the time lots of my customers arrive, so's they'll get an early start. But they went right to bed! Can you beat that? And they slept all day until about an hour ago. At least they stayed in their cabin, so I guess they were sleeping."

Ken and Sandy both laughed, because Joe obviously expected them to.

"Yes, sir," Joe said. "In my opinion, a real fisherman is a man who never wastes his time sleeping when he could be fishing instead."

Back in the car again, and driving off with a last wave, Sandy said, "Well? I know you've discovered something, but I don't know what it is. The minute you saw that book you got that funny look on your face."

"They're phonies," Ken said. "Jones and Wolf may be their names-I couldn't tell about that. But they didn't give their right address. The numbers on West Forty-sixth Street don't go up that high. Number 936 would be somewhere out in the middle of the Hudson River."

"Yippee!" Sandy shouted. "Now we're getting somewhere!"

"Maybe." Ken tried to sound cautious but the excitement showed in his voice. "I thought of something else, too, back their in that shack. There was no phone. Did you notice? In fact, Tod said the other day that the only pay phone in town was at the inn. So maybe that's why the inn was broken into last night. Maybe our friends Jones and Wolf had to report to somebody that the fire they started wasn't a complete success-that it got rained out before it burned down the tents."



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ENEMY CLOSES IN

Sandy drove back as rapidly as he dared. They could hardly wait to report to Dan the results of their investigation at Joe's Fishing Camp, and Ken's deduction as to why the Claytown Inn had been broken into the night before.

But when they dashed into the work tent Dan wasn't seated there alone. Tod was with him—a Tod who looked confused and unhappy and angry, all at once.

"Back so soon?" Sandy said blankly.

Tod's smile was grim. "By request. Seems Mr. Barnes has changed his mind. He was too busy to show me his place, even too busy to talk to me."

"But only a little while ago—" Ken began.

"I know," Tod said shortly. "Only a little while ago he was inviting us over there. But when I arrived he wasn't even civil—practically slammed the door in my face."

Dan looked at his friend sympathetically. "I certainly don't understand it," he muttered.

"Maybe he just didn't like my face when he saw it close up," Tod said. Clearly he was both hurt and baffled. With an obvious effort he turned to the boys. "Well, what'd you find out?"

Ken tried to recapture the excitement he had felt a moment before, if only to distract Tod's attention. "You may not think it adds up to much," he said, "but it seems to us it's pretty suspicious." He repeated the conversation with Joe and the conclusions he had drawn from it.

Dan was undeniably impressed. Even Tod seemed to forget for a moment his rude treatment at the hands of Mr. Barnes.

"You're sure that address is a fake?" Tod asked.

"Ken knows New York like you know that old map of yours," Sandy assured them. "If he says there is no such number, he must be right."

They discussed it for some time, and both Tod and Dan seemed inclined to accept Ken's suggestion that it would be worth while to try to find out a little more about the men who called themselves Wolf and Jones.

"We could keep an eye on the fishing camp, in case they come back," Ken pointed out. "And if they don't turn up there, we might ask Clem—late tonight, when he gets home—to run down the creek in his skiff and see if they're still there. Clem goes out at night so often in his skiff it wouldn't appear strange."

“Ken and I could go back to the village now and find some place to hide near Joe’s,” Sandy offered.

“No, you don’t-not alone,” Dan said firmly. “Remember we feel responsible for you. If we’re agreed that we ought to keep an eye on Joe’s, I’ll go along.”

“Too bad we can’t check that idea of yours about them making a phone call from the inn last night,” Tod said.

“We can,” Ken pointed out.

Dan smiled. “Have you ever tried tracing a call? I’m afraid that won’t work, Ken. The phone company doesn’t give out that kind of information.”

“Not to us-I know,” Ken agreed. “But there’s a good chance we might get the information through Global News. Granger has a lot of friends in the police department. The police can easily find out whether a call was made late last night from the inn.”

“Well, what are we waiting for then?” Tod got up and began to move restlessly around in the crowded tent. “Let’s do something, even if it doesn’t make much sense. You three go into town.”

“Don’t you want one of us to stay here with you, Tod?” Sandy asked.

“No. I’ll be all right. Get going.”

Dan stood up. “O.K. Come on,” he said to the boys. “If it looks as though we’re going to be gone very long,” he added to Tod, “one of us will drive back here and let you know what’s happening.”

In the convertible once more, on their way back to town, Ken said uneasily, “Tod looks about as happy as a fish on the end of a hook. I wish we hadn’t left him alone.”

“He wanted it that way,” Dan assured them. “I know he’s unhappy. I suppose I would be too, if I’d just been given an inexplicable bum’s rush like that.”

“What do you suppose came over Mr. Barnes, anyway?” Sandy asked.

Dan shrugged. “Who knows? Sometimes these eccentric millionaires.” He broke off. “Though I must say he seemed mighty decent this afternoon,” he admitted. “I guess there’s no point trying to understand it. The only thing we can do is to get Tod to stop fretting over it. The best way to do that was to leave him there alone. He’ll start poring over that old map, or over his notebooks, and by the time we get back he probably won’t even remember he was kicked in the teeth.”

Sandy pressed a little harder on the accelerator. “And if, by any chance, we can take back some real news about the mysterious prowlers we’ve had at the camp lately, maybe he’ll feel good enough to forget Mr. Barnes altogether.”

The sun had set long ago. It was completely dark by the time they reached Claytown. They stopped several hundred feet from Joe's Fishing Camp, and Sandy and Dan got out.

"After I've called Global News from Clem's I'll come back and park right here," Ken said, sliding over into the driver's seat.

"We'll prowl around and then come back here to meet you," Sandy said.

Granger wasn't at his desk, but Ken wasn't surprised when the manager's new young assistant accepted Ken's call without question.

"Mr. Granger said to take any calls we might ever get from you," he told Ken. "That was one of my first orders on this job. What can I do for you?"

Ken explained what he wanted and the assistant's cordial manner changed to coolness. It was clear that he thought Ken was taking advantage of being Richard Holt's son.

Ken didn't give in. "Tell Granger it's really important," he urged. "Tell him that if we can learn something about that phone call we may have a story for him after all."

"I'll tell him."

Ken knew the young man himself was unconvinced, but that he wouldn't dare to withhold the message from Granger. And Granger would put the inquiry through. Ken had known him long enough to feel certain of that.

"I'll call back in a couple of hours for the information," Ken said, before he hung up.

When he parked the car at the spot where he had left Dan and Sandy he saw no sign of them at first. But the redhead appeared within a few moments, walking quietly.

"They just came in," Sandy murmured. "We watched Joe help them beach the boat. They went right to their cabin. We'd already discovered a good spot right outside one cabin window-there's a good clump of bushes there. Dan's holding the fort. Come on."

Sandy led the way, swinging in a wide arc around the little beach where they could barely make out the round figure of Joe, apparently cleaning the boat the men had used. Soon Ken found they were heading for the rear of the only lighted cabin in the little row of fishing shacks. They came up so quietly that Dan didn't even see them until Sandy whispered, "We're back."

Dan rose up then from the bushes that had concealed him. He took a few steps away from the cabin and they joined him.

"Window's shut," Dan breathed. "Can't hear what they're saying. But they seem to be throwing their stuff together as if they were getting ready to leave. The window's pretty high up-I can't see the whole room."

Ken touched Sandy's arm and pointed. Sandy was the tallest of the three of them. Sandy nodded and melted away into the darkness.

Long minutes ticked by.

Ken was sorting out his thoughts, wondering if there was anything else that they might be doing in addition to watching the men who called themselves Jones and Wolf. Suddenly he caught his breath: there was something else and he'd missed it! The two men must have driven to the camp in a car. They should have taken the number of the car and turned that over to Granger too.

Perhaps he should do that immediately, Ken thought. He was about to lean close to Dan and whisper his intention to him when he realized that Sandy was beside them again.

"Come on!" They could barely catch Sandy's words. "They're leaving. Let's get to the car fast!"

They were in the car, with Sandy at the wheel, before he spoke again. "Ken," he said, "Jones and Wolf have got a portable phonograph-one of those old-fashioned kind that have to be wound by hand. Does that give you any ideas?" As he asked the question he guided the car out onto the road that passed in front of Joe's, keeping well back from the driveway.

"Any ideas?" Ken repeated. And then he got it. "You could make the sound of a horse's galloping hoofs with a phonograph!"

"What!" Dan exploded.

Sandy talked past him to Ken. "Just what I thought! Looks like this whole crazy business might finally tie up into one. There they go!"

A car was easing out of Joe's driveway. It turned toward the left, on the street that was Claytown's main business thoroughfare. Sandy let it get a few hundred feet ahead and then he eased up on his brake and followed.

Neither of his passengers spoke during the next few minutes. The car ahead moved at a normal rate of speed, and when it reached the lane that led toward their camp, it turned off.

"Well!" Sandy said. "Here goes-maybe!"

He slowed down, so that by the time he turned into that road the cloud of dust raised by the other car would conceal the blacked-out convertible. Their quarry, up ahead, was only a pair of twin taillights seen faintly through the murk.

"Wish we had radar on this car," Sandy muttered. The taillights ahead dissolved completely in the dust.

Sandy kept the convertible moving forward at a slow but steady pace. It was difficult to know how far they had come in the dusty darkness.

"I think we just passed Barnes' lane," Sandy said finally.

In almost the same instant Ken said, "The dust's gone!"

"They must have turned in there!" Dan said, suddenly sitting forward excitedly. "But if they're Mr. Barnes' friends-" He stopped, puzzled.

Sandy braked to a stop. "What do we do now?"

The new development was so unexpected that neither of the others answered for a moment. Then Ken said, "Hold everything. I'll be right back." Before they could protest, he was out of the car and heading down the Barnes lane on foot. He had to go only halfway. The lights were on at the lodge, inside and outside. Ken started back for the car at a run.

"They're not sneaking up there," he reported breathlessly. "Everything's lighted up as if Barnes were expecting them, and they walked across the lighted parking space as bold as brass."

"Then Barnes is a part of all this, whatever it is!" Dan sounded as if he could hardly believe his own words. "No wonder he didn't want Tod to come in tonight!"

"Let's get back to camp-fast!" Ken said. "Tod's alone there and-"

He didn't have to finish the sentence. Sandy had already snapped the convertible into action. A moment later they were turning to the right and bumping across the sandy track that led from the lane to the tents.

Prompted by an alarm he couldn't put into words, Ken had his hand on the door handle, ready to leap out the moment Sandy braked to a stop beside the jeep. Dan was right behind him, and Sandy emerged through the opposite door almost simultaneously.

As they all ran the few hundred feet toward the tents Dan was calling, "Tod! Tod, it's us!"

The glow of the gasoline lantern showing through the canvas wall of the work tent was a reassuring sight. By its light they guided themselves around the tent ropes to the open doorway.

"Tod," Dan began, in the split second before he reached the opening, "we saw-" His voice died in his throat.

Ken and Sandy, coming up to look over his shoulder, realized almost as quickly as Dan did that the tent was empty.

"Tod!" Dan had turned toward the creek and was cupping his hands around his mouth. "Tod!" His voice, through that improvised megaphone, sounded startlingly loud.

As if by previous agreement they all hurried into the work tent then, snatched up flashlights, and dashed out again. The three beams began to make crisscross patterns of light in the darkness. Across the pattern three voices continued to shout. "Tod! Tod! Where are you? Tod!"

"Something's happened to him!" There was a note of panic in Dan's voice.

“Look here! Over here!” Ken waved his flashlight above his head as a signal. In a moment the other two were beside him. He pointed the light downward then. Its rays revealed one of their own shovels, heavily caked with damp sand. “Tod doesn’t leave tools around like that,” Ken said.

“He wouldn’t have done any more digging tonight,” Dan said. “He couldn’t see what he was doing in the dark. He wouldn’t have taken such a chance. What does it mean?”

“Dan! Look at this!” Sandy had turned his own light still another few feet away, and when the others stared at the patch of ground it illuminated, they saw a circular pit about three feet in diameter and almost four feet deep. “We never dug that one,” Sandy said. “It’s between the creek and the trench where you found the logs this afternoon.”

They didn’t waste breath agreeing with him. The truth of Sandy’s statement was obvious.

Ken began to search the ground around the unexpected pit. Suddenly he stooped and picked up a length of wood. “Our stake. They must have pulled it out because it was in their way.”

Dan was no longer in a mood to shout wildly. He moved toward Ken, took the stake from him and studied it, and then nodded his head. His own flashlight probed the darkness to establish their position.

“You’re right. That’s the new stake we just drove in, according to the new measurements,” he said quietly.

Ken took it up, on the same quiet note. “I think this is where Sandy and I put the stake the first time,” he said. “They, whoever they are, moved it during the night, so that today it was twenty-two feet out of line. Then they came back tonight to dig in the spot we’d originally marked.”

“You’ve got it!” Sandy said. “They had something hidden here and they were afraid we’d dig it up, so they moved the stake!”

Dan was concentrating furiously. “And if I hadn’t paced fifteen feet away from the stake this afternoon, for luck”-he groaned-“we’d have hit whatever it is they were after. And they wouldn’t have-” He raised his head, staring at them in the ghostly glow of the flashlights. “What’s happened to Tod? That’s what we’ve got to find out now! If they’ve hurt him or-“

Ken reached out swiftly and knocked Dan’s light to the ground, flicking his own off in the same instant. “Cut your light!” he said, and Sandy’s went out too.

“Look back there-by the tents,” Ken said, as they all blinked in the utter darkness.

The other two heads turned until they too were looking in the

direction Ken had indicated. There was a faint glow there-a glow that grew slowly brighter.

“That’s a car coming,” Ken said quietly. “Let’s get into the tall grass-quick-and see what happens.”

Dan was his usual calm self once more, in the face of this new unexpected danger. “This way!” One hand closed over Sandy’s arm and the other over Ken’s wrist and he led the way southward, in the direction away from the spit with its rising ground.

Before Ken swung completely around to follow him he caught one glimpse of a beam of light flashing outward from the high ground on the spit, and then disappearing again.

“They’re coming from two directions,” he breathed, as he and Sandy both moved after Dan in the darkness.

# CHAPTER XV

## THE TELLTALE FOOTPRINTS

"Here!" Dan had reached the big boulder, and was dropping flat on the ground behind it. The boys lowered themselves beside him.

"They certainly mean business, creeping up on the place from both sides at once," Ken murmured.

"Do you think they know we're here?" Sandy breathed.

"They must," Dan said grimly, "from the way we were yelling and flashing our lights around. Just seeing the two cars up there would tell them that, anyway. That's probably the purpose of the two-prong arrival-to keep us from getting away without their knowing it." He lifted his head to peer over the rock. "There are two men in front of the work tent and two more coming down from the hill."

From the protection of their sheltering mass of stone they could see the bobbing flashlights meet in front of the tents and hover there, as if the men carrying them were holding a conference. No word of the conversation drifted down to where Dan and the boys lay, but it soon became clear that some sort of argument had developed. The voices began to sound angry. One flashlight pointed commandingly down toward the creek. Another stabbed as if in disagreement toward the tents.

Suddenly two of the flashlights bobbed their way around to the rear of the tents and disappeared. After another few moments the two other lights flicked out. For a time there was neither sound nor light in the neighborhood of the tents, but then a car motor came alive.

"They're leaving!" Sandy said.

"But we can't be sure they've all gone," Ken pointed out. "Maybe two of the men just turned their lights out and are waiting up there in the dark."

They strained their eyes trying to see something, and strained their ears to hear. There was no longer any sign of the intruders.

"You're right though, Ken," Dan whispered. "Two of them may still be there." After another long moment of watchful silence, he added, "The question is, what do we do now? And what's happened to Tod?"

Ken hesitated to make the answer that was in his mind, but it seemed to him the only logical one.

"We know Tod didn't go anywhere in the car," he said. "The jeep was there when we came back. We know he wouldn't have walked very far away and left the camp unguarded. If he heard the men who were over there digging that hole, he probably came out to see what was going on-and it looks as if he got into a fight with them. We know



they didn't just go off and leave him there, or we'd have found him when we were looking around. So it seems to me the only answer is that Tod went off with them, either willingly or unwillingly."

"If he'd gone willingly he'd have left us a message of some kind," Dan said. "I'm sure of that. So it must have been the other way. But where did they take him?"

"My guess is to Barnes' lodge," Ken said.

"Mine too," Sandy agreed.

"If everything that's been happening around here is really all tied up together-and if we know that Jones and Wolf went to Barnes' place tonight-then I think we've got to assume that everything centers there." Ken spoke slowly.

"Then let's get over to that lodge and get Tod out of there!" Sandy said.

"Oh, no!" Dan put a restraining hand on his arm. "This is no time for crazy heroics. First we'll get some help, and then we'll go to the lodge."

"Dan's right, Sandy," Ken said.

"I know he is," Sandy muttered reluctantly.

"I'm going to town for the police," Dan said. "If I go on foot and through the fields, I don't think anybody up there"-he jerked his head toward the tents-"will even notice. You two stay right here. Keep down out of sight but keep your ears open."

Ken was no more eager to accept this waiting role than Sandy was, but he saw the wisdom of it. "Right, Dan," he said. "Good luck."

"I'll be in Claytown in half an hour, I hope. And I'll look for you right here when I get back."

Suddenly Dan was gone, melting into the darkness. For a moment they could hear a faint rustling of the grass as he moved along, and then there was silence.

Ken and Sandy sat without speaking for some time. They looked out over the rock at intervals but saw no sign of the intruders.

Sandy said, "Well, we've finally got a chance to talk over that twenty-two-foot mistake-and now I guess there's no point in it." There was a wry grin behind the tension in his voice.

"I guess not," Ken agreed. "I'm pretty sure we were right when we decided that somebody had shifted the stake. But we still have no idea why-or what these people are after."

"Or who they are, except that one of them is apparently Barnes, and two call themselves Jones and Wolf. But names don't tell us much," Sandy added.

"But if there's something here that Barnes wanted to dig up, why did he wait until now?" Ken asked.

"Arid why would he bury anything over here in the first place?"

Sandy added. "Why not use his own land, where he could be sure of privacy if that's what he wanted?"

"Do you suppose Hawkins is mixed up in it too?" Ken wondered. "Clem seems to have known him for a long time, and I think Clem must be a pretty good judge of character."

Sandy shrugged. "Hawkins might be smart enough to fool Clem. Or on the other hand he might be perfectly innocent, and not have any idea of what his boss has been doing-and is doing."

Ken smote a fist angrily into his palm. "I wish we'd had some reason to suspect Barnes earlier. I could have asked Granger to find out about him. This wealthy-Philadelphia-sportsman business must all be a front. If we really knew something about him--"

"Maybe he's all those things-now," Sandy suggested. "How about this: Barnes was one of the old rumrunning gang that Clem talked about. He got rich, bought a house down here because he'd got to know the place, and settled down to be respectable. That would explain how the galloping-horse thing occurred to him. He remembered that they'd used it years ago, and that it worked then."

Ken nodded slowly. "That could be it, I suppose." Suddenly he sat upright, clamping Sandy's arm with a grip like a vise. "We're out of our heads! Here we sit wondering what was in that hole-and forgetting the important thing! Whatever it was, they've got it now! So what's keeping them here? Isn't it likely they'd be leaving immediately, since they know Tod's disappearance will stir up plenty of trouble around here?"

He half got to his feet and Sandy pulled him down. "Take it easy! I see your point-but what can we do? If they haven't managed to get away by now, they may run head on into the police on their way out. Dan would know that any car going down the road toward town was suspicious and ought to be stopped. And if they've already left, the police can send out orders for road blocks."

Ken's body was still tense. "They can't block up Delaware Bay! And that cruiser of Barnes' could be out in its open water in less than half an hour after it left the dock! With Tod on board! They'd hardly leave him behind to give them away."

"Wow!" Sandy breathed. "You're right! The cruiser!"

"Can't you do something to a boat to keep it from moving out?" Ken said urgently. "Damage it somehow? Think!"

"Sure," Sandy said. "If I could get at the engines for a couple of minutes."

"Then let's get going! We can't afford to wait here for Dan. That might be too late!"

Instinctively they both turned and peered over the rock. Everything was still quiet and dark.

“They probably all left at the same time,” Ken said bitterly. “And we’ve been sitting here whispering while—Come on!”

“How’ll we get to the cruiser?” Sandy asked. “In the dinghy?”

“No. It would show up on the water if there’s anybody watching. We’ll have to walk around the shore line.”

They moved out from the shelter of the rock and ran, bent low, toward the creek. No shouts sounded behind them and no lights flashed. The lack of reaction to their movement convinced Ken that he had been right when he belatedly concluded that all the intruders had left some time earlier.

Even so they moved carefully along the beach, straining their eyes to avoid any obstacles that might cause a crashing tumble. The sand muffled their footsteps. Fortunately, it was a dark night. There was no moon and most of the stars were hidden behind light slow-moving clouds. In front of them, as they moved northward, the small hill was only a faintly darker shadow against the gray-black sky. The only sounds they could hear were the tiny splashes of small fish jumping in the creek.

Ken walked with one eye on the hill. That’s where a guard would be, he thought, if even a single guard had been left. Suddenly he saw something—a solid shape, higher than the grass, outlined quite clearly for an instant against a patch of cloud lighter than the rest of the sky.

There was a guard, posted on the hilltop!

Ken reached back, caught Sandy’s arm to bring him to a halt, and put his mouth close against the redhead’s ear to warn him.

When they started forward again they moved with even greater caution, testing each spot to make sure it was free of crackling twigs or dry reeds before they put their weight on it. It seemed to Ken that it took them a long time before they finally reached the point of the spit and turned to follow its north shore.

Suddenly Sandy was close against him, breathing against his ear.

“Let’s swim from here.” He gestured toward the stretch of shore between the base of the spit and Barnes’ dock. Even in the darkness the half-sandy, half-pebbled beach there was visible—a wide pale streak at the dark water’s edge.

Ken realized immediately what Sandy meant. If they tried to reach Barnes’ dock by following the shore line all the way, they would certainly be visible to the guard on the hill when they crossed that particular stretch.

He looked across the little bay formed by the protecting spit of land. It was quite a swim to the dock. But it was the only safe way to reach the *Kingfisher*.

“O.K.” Ken whispered. “Let’s go.” He gave Sandy a small push to indicate that he was to lead the way. Ken was a better swimmer than

Sandy and might outdistance him if he went ahead.

Sandy turned toward the water and a moment later was wading into the creek. Ken followed.

The water was warm, and the tide was coming in. It was strong enough so that they could almost have floated with it up the creek. Everything seemed in their favor. But even so they had to move carefully to avoid splashing. Ken was glad they were both wearing shorts and light sneakers. Slowly, stroke by stroke, they moved toward their goal.

Finally, they could sense the towering bulk of the *Kingfisher* less than two hundred feet away, although it was still impossible to tell whether the cruiser was on the downstream side of the dock or beyond it. Ken took a deep breath. He felt as if he had been in the water for hours.

Suddenly his hand froze just as he was about to cleave the water once more. Off to the right, on shore, he saw the flash of a light. Almost immediately a voice shouted a muffled "Be careful!" Footsteps sounded on wood.

At least two men were coming down the boardwalk from the lodge.

Ken felt Sandy come to a stop too, just ahead of him. The big redhead's breathing was slow and labored. They both began to tread water, remaining where they were.

The bobbing flashlight reached the inshore end of the dock and illuminated part of the *Kingfisher*. She was tied up on the far side of the dock, riding motionless, her bow facing shoreward and her stern toward the channel of the creek. She was considerably longer than the dock, her aft deck extending at least ten feet beyond the end of the timbered structure.

By the movements of the flashlight and the fitful scenes that appeared in its glow, the boys could see that two men were carrying something heavy aboard the cruiser. A solid thump told them that the object had been deposited onto the deck.

"That's right," a voice said. "Drop it anywhere. We can stow stuff where it belongs when we're underway."

A match flared. Instantly the same voice spoke again. "Save the cigarettes for later too. The boss said to make it snappy. We've got several more loads to bring down here."

Then the flashlight turned shoreward again and pointed back the way it had come, up the walk toward Barnes' lodge. Once more footsteps sounded hollowly on the planking.

Ken swallowed. They wouldn't have much time to tamper with the *Kingfisher*. She was apparently about ready to leave, and the brief interval remaining before she cast off would be broken by further

loading trips from the lodge.

Sandy touched his shoulder as a signal and moved forward again, at a more rapid pace than they had dared attempt before. When they reached the piling of the dock, Sandy flung an arm around one slimy upright and waited for Ken to join him. The planking of the dock was about five feet above their heads, and on the other side of the structure, like a solid wall, rose the black side of the *Kingfisher*.

"It's too late to try to do anything to the engines," Sandy whispered. "I'd have to prowl around below decks looking for them first and those men would probably be back here before I got started."

Ken nodded agreement, too preoccupied to realize that Sandy couldn't see him in the inky darkness beneath the dock.

"But maybe we can cut her mooring lines," Sandy went on. "She'd drift upstream, then run aground at the first curve."

"They could get her free again."

"Sure, but it would take a little time. Dan's on his way with the police by now, probably. And they'll come right to the lodge when they don't find us at camp."

"All right. If it's the best we can do. I've got a knife," Ken added, feeling his pocket to make sure he hadn't lost the small pocket blade during his swim. The shape of it under his hand was reassuring. "Under the dock?" He moved as if to start across the narrow-roofed channel toward the *Kingfisher*.

Sandy held him back. "We can't climb aboard from the water-she's too high. Have to get up on the dock and get to the deck from there."

Ken didn't argue. He knew Sandy had more knowledge of boats than he did.

Cautiously they eased themselves shoreward by moving from one piling to the next, keeping in the shelter of the dock. The water grew shallower until they were walking on the bottom. Ken stretched his arm upward and found he could touch the planking overhead. In two more steps he was able to reach around and get a handhold on the edge of the dock.

"Come on," he breathed, poised ready to haul himself up.

At that instant they heard the voices again, and froze into immobility. Steps sounded on the boardwalk and fitful gleams from a flashlight glimmered on the water beyond them. The boys cowered back into the shelter of the dock.

"This tub will sink with all the junk we're putting on her." The words were gasped rather than spoken. "What's the use of taking all this stuff along?"

Loud steps clumped over the boys' heads.

"Don't ask me. I only work here, same as you do. I figure the brains up there can take care of the thinking."

“Maybe the brains should do a little carrying too,” the first voice grumbled. “I’ll get on board and you hand me the stuff.”

There was the sound of two thuds, both solid as of considerable weights landing on the forward deck.

“Want me to blink for Chuck?” the same voice asked.

“Might as well. We’re about ready to shove off.”

The boys could see faint reflections as a powerful flash blinked on and off three times. Then, again, footsteps retreated up the wooden walk.

“Hurry up!” Sandy breathed.

The boys emerged from under the dock and in a few swift movements were standing on the wooden planking that had just been above them. Silently, on their sneakered feet, they reached the *Kingfishers* midships and stepped over her rail.

In another instant they were huddled in the forward cockpit of the boat, and Sandy was sawing at the heavy hawser that stretched to a cleat on the dock.

The line was tough and thick, and Ken’s small knife was inadequate for the task. But Sandy’s powerful thrusts kept the little blade moving swiftly back and forth. One by one the strands gave way.

And then Ken ducked and said “Down!” and dragged Sandy to the deck beside him. A powerful beam of light from the shore, slightly to the south of the dock, had just swept over the boat.

“Hey!” a new voice called out. “You guys down there?”

Ken remembered that the others had blinked their flashlight to call in a man they had spoken of as Chuck. Chuck, he realized, must have been the guard on the hill-and Chuck was now approaching the *Kingfisher*. Already his feet were echoing on the planking of the dock.

They stopped suddenly.

With a sinking at the pit of his stomach Ken knew that he and Sandy had left wet footprints on the dock and that Chuck was now looking at them and wondering.

“You guys been in swimming?” For the second time there was no response to the newcomer’s question. Chuck’s voice suddenly lifted in a loud shout, and his flashlight signaled once toward the lodge before he turned it full on the boat. “Hey!” he yelled. “There must be somebody aboard! Come on down here!”

His light found the huddled figures of the boys just as an answering shout sounded from the lodge. “Keep them covered! We’re coming!”

Chuck moved toward the boys, his light stabbing ahead of him to hold them in its brilliant beam.

Sandy leaped straight at him. His flailing arm struck Chuck’s light

and sent it in a flying arc that ended in the water. Then he grabbed the hand that had held the light and pulled hard. The man tumbled into the cockpit, bellowing as he fell.

Feet were thudding down the boardwalk as Sandy picked the man up and hurled him bodily over the side.

He and Ken both had their hands on the rail, ready to follow Sandy's victim, when two flashlights centered them with deadly accuracy.

"Don't move. You're covered. Get up here on the dock!"

The figures behind the lights were shadowy, but the voice had the ring of complete authority. It was the voice of a man who was accustomed to being obeyed.

From over the side, where Chuck had landed in the shallow water, came an angry yell. "Hey! Throw me a line. I'm stuck in the mud-mud deep enough to bury a battleship!"

For an instant Ken thought his wildly thudding heart had stopped altogether. He and Sandy had heard that voice before, speaking almost those same words. They had heard it three nights ago when they stood safe on a bridge looking toward a station wagon mired in the stream-a station wagon that had trailed them from Brentwood!

# CHAPTER XVI

## DESPERATE SITUATION

"Stand still, you two!" An automatic, glinting in the light, gave additional authority to the commanding voice. "You O.K., Chuck?" the voice added.

The splashing confusion in the creek below them was no greater than the confusion in Ken's mind.

Chuck choked on the water he had swallowed, and then found his voice again. "Those are the two kids that got away from me the other night! Wait till the boss sees them!"

The flashlight moved closer to the boys, blinding in its intensity. "That right?" the voice behind it said. "You Holt's kid?"

"Sure he is! I told you!" Chuck's dripping mud-streaked figure joined the little group on the *Kingfishers* deck. "Let me at them!" The man's outstretched hands were curled like huge talons.

"Later, Chuck."

"That's twice they dumped me in the mud!" Chuck raged. "I'll-!"

"I said later!" The voice cracked like a whip.

"O.K., O.K." Chuck fell back. "But I'm telling you-"

"Save it." Then the gun gestured toward Ken. "Come on up to the house." He motioned to Chuck to lead the way and the procession of four moved shoreward, the boys walking single file between the two men.

The boardwalk up to the lodge seemed interminable, but even so the distance was not long enough to permit Ken to straighten out his thoughts. Occasional glimpses of Sandy's face, over his shoulder, told him that the redhead was equally confused-and equally alarmed at the situation they found themselves in.

When they were at last shoved unceremoniously into a lighted room they stood side by side, blinking, trying to focus on what seemed a blur of faces.

"Ken! Sandy!"

Their eyes found him finally-Tod, lying full length on the floor, bound hand and foot. Stretched beside him, and similarly bound, was Barnes' captain and Clem's friend, John Hawkins. Arthur Barnes himself was sitting in a chair, and it was a moment before the boys realized that he too was tied, his wrists lashed to the arms of the chair, his ankles to the chair's legs.

"What's this?" The new voice that broke into the silence had a gravelly sound, as if the speaker formed his words deep in his throat.

"Wait till you hear, Red! This'll kill you." The man who had



brought the boys up to the lodge at the point of his gun stepped around now into the light. He was tall and thin, and the skin was stretched tight over the bones of his face. He seemed amused now. "This'll kill you, Red," he repeated.

"Go ahead, Tex. Kill me." The man with the gravelly voice sounded as if he had never been amused in his life. Even the thatch of close-waved reddish-gray hair capping his heavy skull had a dead, almost lifeless look.

Ken's eyes met Sandy's in a single look of full realization. Red and Tex! Their captors were Red Davis and Tex Walters-two of the four men for whom a nationwide hunt was now in progress, who had threatened to kidnap Ken if Richard Holt dared to testify against them.

"That one-the one with the black hair," Tex Walters was saying, "is Richard Holt's bright boy! These are the kids who made a monkey out of Chuck here. How do you like that?"

"Nobody makes a monkey out of me and lives to get away with it!" Chuck growled. "I'm going to teach those punks a thing or two!"

"Almost anybody can make a monkey out of you, Chuck," Davis said. His well-manicured hands, with dead-white skin, played idly with a gold cigarette lighter.

Chuck's blustering manner quieted. He didn't try to argue. He even took a step backward, as if meekly accepting the rebuke.

Davis turned cold pale-blue eyes on Ken. "So you're Holt's kid! Too bad your old man couldn't keep his nose out of our business. Everybody would be a lot better off if he had-me and the rest of the boys, your father-and especially you."

Ken deliberately turned his head away. It was the only gesture of disdain he could make. He saw then that there was still another man in the room. He was short and pudgy and, like Chuck, he was almost bald. The few scraggly locks he had left, carefully combed flat, only emphasized the scantiness of his hair.

Ken was beyond surprise. And in any case they had known that Jones and Wolf had come to the lodge. This pudgy man, now moving quietly toward Davis, was one of those two. He was not the man with the missing fingers, but he was Missing Fingers' associate.

"Look, boss," he was saying, "there's still another one of these guys loose. Maybe we better shove off right away."

Davis answered without bothering to look at him. "Mitch is on the lookout for him. Don't worry. He can't get far, if you fixed those cars the way I told you to."

"Oh, sure, we fixed them all right. The jeep and the convertible both."

Tex Walters said, "Relax, Ben. Mitch'll pick him up. Anyway, we can't move out until the tide turns." He turned his sardonic smile on

Hawkins. "Isn't that right, Cap?"

Hawkins looked steadily at him but without answering.

Chuck lunged across the room at the stocky captain. "Answer when you're spoken to!" He drew back his hand.

"Chuck!" Red Davis' hoarse low voice could sound oddly menacing. Chuck backed away, glowering. "Right now I think we'd better do a little talking ourselves," Davis went on. "In there." He indicated a doorway leading to an adjoining room. "Chuck, you come with us. Come on, Tex." He got easily to his feet. "Ben, you stay here and keep an eye on our guests. And don't get any funny ideas about that, either." For a moment his cold eyes focused on a box in one corner of the room. "I know exactly how much is in there," Davis added.

"You know me better than that, boss." Ben's pudgy face was creased into an ingratiating grin.

"I know you very well. That's why I'm warning you." And then Davis led Tex Walters and Chuck through the door, which he ordered Chuck to close behind them.

Ken looked at Sandy, glanced at the box in the corner, and then back to Sandy again. The redhead nodded.

One more piece of the puzzle had fallen into place. The box appeared to be made of lead and was about two feet square and a foot deep. The soft lead of the top had been sliced open to reveal neat packets of currency.

It was the loot from the two-year-old Central Valley Bank robbery, Ken realized-loot which had been safely hidden until it was needed to finance a getaway. Since the gangsters' bank accounts and safe-deposit boxes had been seized by the government, this money probably represented their only resource. No wonder, Ken thought with grim humor, they had been so eager to get it out from under the noses of Tod Hayworth and his enthusiastic shovel wielders!

"Over against the wall, you two!" Ben was saying. He motioned Ken and Sandy to a position directly opposite where Tod and Hawkins lay helpless. "Stand close together so I can cover you both. That's right." He pulled a chair up so that he could sit with his gun pointed in their direction. Its muzzle swung back and forth in a small arc. He grinned again. "I'm a pretty good man with a gun, so don't try any tricks."

They didn't need his warning. It was only too clear that any attempt to break out of the lodge, even if they didn't try to take Tod and the others with them, was doomed to failure.

"You all right, Tod?" Ken asked.

Ben frowned, but he didn't demand silence.

"Sure." Tod's jaw was clenched. "They just played me for a sucker,

that's all."

"We sure did!" Ben sounded as if he were beginning to enjoy the conversation.

"Of course I thought it was you when I first saw the lights of their car," Tod explained. "I walked out and the next thing I knew I had a gun in my ribs. They took me with them down toward the creek. Then Ben, here," he went on, "and the gentleman they call Chuck dug a deep hole down by our new stake and pulled up a fortune." For the first time his grin was almost natural. "I owe you boys an apology about that measurement. You'd put the stake in the right place the first time. But when the fire died down and our friends found they didn't have time to do their digging then, they moved it so we wouldn't dig there ourselves."

"Sure we moved it," Ben said. He laughed good-naturedly. "Why, we thought for a minute you'd found the stuff and had put the stake there to mark the spot. Imagine us thinking you were that smart!"

Ken looked carefully past the grinning face to Mr. Barnes. "We owe you and the captain an apology too. We thought you were in on this."

Barnes spoke up for the first time. He was not a young man and his plump body seemed to have shriveled since they had first seen him on the deck of the *Kingfisher* early that evening. But his voice was steady. "No apologies needed, son. I'm only sorry my unexpected-er-guests forced me to be so rude to Mr. Hayworth when he came to call at my invitation." A faint twinkle appeared in his eyes and he looked sharply at Ken as he said his next words. "Speaking of suckers, would you say we might expect-er-succor soon?"

For a moment Ken didn't get it, and then he almost grinned. "Succor's on the way," he said.

"Hey!" Ben said. "What kind of double talk is that?"

"If you'd stayed in school past the second grade," Tod told him, looking suddenly more cheerful, "you'd understand simple English." The relief on his face was so obvious that Ken found himself hoping Ben wouldn't look at him just then. There had been no way to tell Tod, until this moment, that Dan had left to get help.

"They say there's one bom every minute," Ken said, to keep Ben's attention on himself. "So I guess there ought to be one along pretty soon."

"Very good, boys." Arthur Barnes' eyes were twinkling again.

Ben was no longer grinning. "You all think you're pretty smart, don't you, talkin' all this stuff that doesn't make sense? Well, I've seen a lot of suckers in my day, but I've never seen any quite as dumb as you guys."

"On that point," Tod assured him, "I wouldn't argue with you."

At that moment the door into the other room opened and Davis

walked in, with Walters and Chuck behind him. Ben got hastily to his feet to let Davis have the chair.

"We've just had a little trial, all fair and aboveboard," Davis said. "And we find you"-he looked at Ken- "*guilty*."

"Guilty of what?" Barnes asked.

"Guilty of having a father who's too smart for his son's good." Davis' glance moved on to Sandy. "And we figure you're such a good friend of his you'd want to share the same verdict."

"Look, Davis," Barnes said, "as a businessman you should know better than to do things that don't return a profit. What good is it going to do you to harm these boys?"

"As a businessman," Davis replied, "I have to keep my valuable reputation for telling the truth. I promised Holt I'd get his son if he continued to interfere with my affairs. I've got to keep my word, so it'll be taken more seriously in the future."

"You don't have a future," Tod snapped out. "You're going to be on the run from now on. But if you let the boys go, it will at least be easier for you when they finally catch up with you and put the handcuffs on your wrists."

Sandy's shoulder was barely touching Ken's, but the contact was enough so that Ken could feel the big redhead's muscles tensing. Sandy was preparing for a last-ditch fight.

"Not yet," Ken warned under his breath.

"What's that?" Davis' head snapped toward him.

"Nothing," Ken said. "What are you going to do with us?"

"We haven't quite decided yet," Davis said. "Tex here has an idea," he added musingly, "but I don't like it very much."

"Just a moment." Barnes spoke up again. "I think I can convince you that it's to your interest to leave these boys alone-to leave us all alone, for that matter."

"Grandpop talks too much," Chuck said.

"So do you," Davis told him shortly. "Go ahead, Barnes. Speak your piece."

"You're going to take my boat down to the bay to meet some other craft, I imagine, that will carry you to where you think you'll be safe." Barnes spoke slowly, stretching each word out in a bid for time.

Davis shrugged. "Go ahead. You're doing the talking-"

"I've heard enough," Barnes went on, "since I've been your prisoner here, to know that you and Walters are running out on some kind of crime investigation."

"I don't run out," Davis said in his gravelly voice. "I follow the chief's plans."

"Call it what you like." Barnes shrugged. "The point is you want to get away-and you intend to use my boat to do it."

"Stop stalling, Barnes," Walters said suddenly. "Get to the point."

"I don't know how good a sailor you or any of your men are," Barnes said, "but--"

"Well, if that's all that's worrying you, relax," Davis told him. "I've got a boat-or rather I had a boat, until those blasted Feds got their hands on it-that's as good as yours. And I know the waters around Delaware Bay too. Why, I ran liquor in here in the old days-in speedboats, mind you!" It seemed to give him pleasure to recall that exciting period.

"But can you maneuver a boat as big as the *Kingfisher* down the creek?" Barnes asked. "She draws almost six feet, and if you don't know every inch of the channel, you'll pile up before you're halfway to the bay. It might interest you to know," he added with deliberate slowness, "that the channel has changed a great deal since your rumrunning days."

"Is that right, Red?" Walters was staring at his associate. "Is he telling the truth, or is that just a stall? If you run us aground, we'll be a pair of sitting ducks."

Every eye in the room was riveted on Davis' pale face.

Ken took a deep breath. Mr. Barnes was doing a fine job of stalling until help came, he realized. A few more minutes certainly ought to be enough to bring Dan here with the police.

"Sure he's right," Davis said.

"Then how are we going to make it, boss?" Ben asked. "If--"

"Shut up." Davis leveled a deadly glance at his underling. "I've done the thinking for this crowd so far, and I'll go right on doing it."

"But--"

"I told you to keep your mouth shut." Davis half rose.

Ben shrank back. "O.K., boss."

"Take it easy, Red," Walters said. "There's no call to blow up at Ben. I'd like to know the answer to his question myself."

"You think maybe you'd like to take over this deal?" Once again, Davis spoke quietly, but his narrowed blue eyes showed furious anger.

"No-no." But Walters didn't back down. "There's no point in fighting among ourselves, though, Red. If you've got a way out, why not tell us?"

"There's a way out all right-such a simple way out I don't know why you couldn't have figured it for yourselves. It's over there." His white finger pointed at John Hawkins.

"You're jumping to a conclusion, Mr. Davis," Barnes said, in his cool, unruffled tones. "Hawkins won't take you down."

"Maybe in your business you don't have to use persuasive methods, Barnes," Davis said. "But we use them all the time-and we're pretty experienced. When the boys here have spent a little time with

Hawkins, he'll take us down all right."

Ken looked at his watch. The swim hadn't harmed its waterproof mechanism. It was still going. Ken's jaw clenched. Dan had had plenty of time to get into town and—

His thoughts broke off as a loud voice sounded in the adjoining room. Then the door burst open and a figure was thrust through into their midst. Behind him was the man who had two fingers missing.

"Dan!" Tod gasped.

Dan stumbled and almost fell. There was an ugly bruise on his temple. His eyes looked vague and half-focused.

"I got him, boss." The man with the missing fingers shoved his gun into his pocket. "I waited right where you said—where the road comes into the village. Guess he thought he was safe by the time he got that far. You should have seen him jump when I popped out at him." The man laughed, and his eyes flicked to Dan's limp figure. "Sucker!" he said scornfully.

"Yes," Ken thought grimly to himself. "We're all suckers. And the succor Dan was going to bring—there's no chance of that now. No chance at all."

# CHAPTER XVII

## DOWN IN THE PIT

“Good work, Mitch.” Davis almost smiled in his approval of the man who had brought Dan in. “Now we can really get ready to take off.”

Again Ken felt Sandy’s powerful shoulder muscles tighten. In a moment the redhead would launch his two hundred pounds across the room in a last and probably futile effort.

“You’re a fool, Davis,” Barnes said quietly. “I had assumed, from the success you’ve achieved in your-er-profession”-the elderly sportsman smiled faintly- “that you were at least remarkably shrewd. You disappoint me. You know you can’t make Hawkins take you to the bay. Suppose you do force him to start out, do you realize how easy it would be for him to swing the wheel a wrong quarter-turn and run you aground?”

“Just let him try it,” Davis said quietly. “He’d find a bullet between his shoulder blades.”

“But where would you find yourselves?” Barnes asked. “Even if you made us all pay for Hawkins’ mistake, where would that leave you?” Deliberately he answered his own question. “Still helplessly aground,” he said.

“You know, boss, he’s right.” Across Ben’s flabby face a shadow of fear had appeared. His small eyes shifted rapidly from Davis to Barnes to Walters and back again.

Swiftly Barnes pursued his advantage. “And there’s something else. Wherever you find a haven, however distant the country, it will perhaps be safe for you if the only charge against you is racketeering. But now you are threatening murder and I have no doubt that you wouldn’t hesitate to carry out the threat.” Again he smiled faintly. “I remember that you are a man of your word. And murder, Mr. Davis, is an extraditable offense. There is no spot in the world distant enough to offer you security, if there is a murder charge against you. Inevitably, sooner or later, you will be hauled back to this country to stand trial-and to be convicted.”

Davis had not interrupted him. That fact alone was testimony to the effectiveness of Barnes’ matter-of-fact manner and his quiet logic. Ken glanced around the room. Chuck was licking his lips nervously. Mitch rubbed his hands down his trousers legs, as if they were sweating. Ben’s eyes were riveted on his leader’s face, and his Adam’s apple bobbed up and down as he kept swallowing. Only Walters maintained his almost debonair calm.

There seemed to be a division of forces imperceptibly asserting itself. The three underlings edged closer together, as if to stand as a unit against the two leaders who had perhaps brought them to a dead end.

With sudden inspiration Ken attempted to drive the dividing wedge still deeper. "Even if Davis pulls the trigger by himself," he said, "you'd all be accessories to his crime. You'd all suffer the same penalty." He had been afraid his voice would crack with the tension that held him, but it had stayed steady.

Arthur Barnes flashed him a congratulatory glance. "The boy's right, of course. I don't have to tell you that, Mr. Davis. But then I don't suppose you concern yourself with the fate of these men who serve you."

"Sure you do. Don't you, boss?" Mitch asked. But his manner was less confident than his words.

Davis didn't answer immediately. His broad white fingers were playing with the gold cigarette lighter again.

"Come on, boss," Chuck said nervously. "Tell old Grandpop to mind his own business and tell us how you're going to make sure the captain gets us safely out to the bay."

"Shut up!" Davis said roughly. "I don't have to discuss my decisions with you!"

Mitch looked at Chuck and then at Ben. There was the same slow anger visible on all three faces. "I think this time you'd better tell us," he said. "And you'd better make it quick."

Davis lurched to his feet. "I'll show you-!"

"Hold it, Red." Walters pointed floorward the muzzle of the gun that had suddenly appeared in Davis' hand. "We're doing just what they've been trying to get us to do-fighting among ourselves. If you want to blast any targets around here, you've got better targets than our own boys to blast at."

"I don't like to see anybody fighting," Barnes said with deceptive mildness. "I was just trying to persuade you to listen intelligently to a suggestion of mine."

"Well, let's have it, Grandpop," Walters said. "We want to hear it, don't we, Red?"

Davis' lips were tight. "Get it over with," he said.

"Well, as I see it," Barnes began, "the whole problem is quite simple. You want a pilot to take you down to the bay. We want our lives and our freedom. You probably don't trust us, and we certainly don't trust you. But we ought to be able to reach some agreement on the basis of hostages. You leave the boys here, unharmed, and we'll take you down to the bay. You can set us adrift there, in the *Kingfisher's* dinghy, and long before we get back to shore you'll be safe



out at sea.”

“And the boys’ll be running for the cops the minute we take off!” Chuck said. “Oh, no!”

Tod had an objection too. “But what makes you think they’ll give us the dinghy? Suppose they just toss us overboard-dead or alive? Dan can’t swim in his condition. We-“

Barnes interrupted him. “We’ll be safe,” he said. “If we don’t return to shore in the dinghy, the boys will know who’s responsible and there’ll be an extradition order and a murder charge out against all these men immediately. There wouldn’t be a harbor in the world where they could land without being seized.”

He glanced over at Chuck. “And as for your objection, the solution to it is perfectly simple: you will see to it that the boys are not able to leave here when we do.”

“You mean we should tie them up and let them wait until somebody finds them?” Walters again had that amused expression that seemed so characteristic of him. “Yes, that would probably give us quite a margin of safety. It might be weeks before anybody discovered them, except, of course, that when you folks came ashore after your cozy ride in the dinghy, you could let them out yourselves. But, as you point out, Grandpop, we’d be miles away by then.”

“Exactly. Naturally,” Barnes said, “I’d like to see you all in jail immediately. But since that seems impossible, I’m trying to make the best of a bad situation.”

“Hmm.” Walters turned to Davis. “What about it, Red? Is there any chance that you could take the boat down to the bay by yourself, so we could forget all this nonsense?”

Davis turned the gold cigarette lighter over three times, slowly. “Of course there’s a chance,” he said in his gravelly voice. “But it’s a chance I’m not going to take. You don’t know anything about boats. You don’t know the risks. I’m not going to see us piled up on the beach simply because we can’t accept Mr. Barnes’ perfectly reasonable suggestion.”

His even tone and pacific manner seemed to alarm Walters more than his sudden flare of anger had previously. “But, Red,” he said, “if-“

Davis got up. “Come in the other room a minute.”

“Not without us.” Mitch took a step forward.

Davis shrugged. “All right, come on, all of you. But you stand in the doorway, Ben, and keep your gun on them.”

They didn’t close the door but the rumble of voices was so low-pitched that no single word could be distinguished by the prisoners. When they returned within a few minutes, Davis was calm and in complete command. Walters, as usual, looked faintly amused.

"All right," Davis said to Barnes. "We're taking you up on your proposition. We'll leave the kids here, tied up, so they can't get loose. You can let them out yourselves, after you stop to inform the police, of course." For once he looked almost as amused as Walters. "I guess we'll leave that one here, too." The toe of his shoe pointed to Dan's seated figure, slumped against the wall. "The boys have carried enough heavy loads down to the boat tonight. We'll spare them this one."

Chuck, Ben, and Mitch all grinned at him. It was clear that the unheard conversation in the other room had resulted in a renewal of good feeling in the group.

"Is that the way you want it, Grandpop?" Davis added with mock politeness.

"It's not the way *I* want it." Tod spoke up unexpectedly. He looked at Mr. Barnes. "Don't you see they plan to double-cross us? I don't know exactly what they've figured out, but I can see they've got some scheme. Maybe they'll set fire to the house just before they leave. Then-" He looked at Dan and at the boys, and there was no need for him to finish the sentence.

Tod was right, Ken thought suddenly. That was exactly what they planned to do. There had been a telltale look of guilty anticipation on Chuck's face when Tod mentioned a fire.

"And after that," Tod went on, "there won't be any need to set us free. You and Hawkins and I will just have disappeared, that's all. Don't you see? It won't work!"

Arthur Barnes' face had paled as Tod spoke. Tod had found a fatal flaw in his plan.

"Are we going to have to go through all this again?" Walters demanded. "You suggested a plan. We agreed to it. Now-"

"Mr. Hayworth is right," Barnes said. "You might set such a fire. I believe you've already decided to do that. Therefore I suggest an alternative to tying the boys up. Put them in the one place in this house where they would be safe in case of fire-a place, I think, you'll agree they can't possibly get out of until I return here to release them."

Davis looked at him skeptically. "What kind of a place is this? It better be good, if-"

"It is. It's as safe as a dungeon," Barnes told him.

"All right," Davis snapped. "I'll be the judge of that. Just tell me where it is."

"When you're ready to leave," Barnes assured him.

"Is it getting time?" He looked at his watch and then at John Hawkins. "It's eleven fifteen, John. What time does the tide turn?"

"Eleven thirty, about." Hawkins, who had been silent all evening,

spoke through stiff jaws.

"Very well. Then I guess it's time to tell you." Barnes spoke directly to Davis. "It's right under your feet. Lift up the rug-you'll find a trap door in the floor."

Davis gestured a command and moved to the edge of the room. Mitch and Chuck pulled the rug back. The trap door was revealed. A heavy ring sunk into one side of it made it possible to raise it up.

Mitch looked questioningly at Davis.

"All right," Davis said impatiently. "Lift it."

The trap door opened on a gaping black hole, and the whole room filled immediately with the musty smell of long-shut-up dampness. Mitch flashed his light down into the void.

"Hey!" he said. "There's water down there!" He grinned at Barnes. "Now who's double-crossing the kids? You want to drown them?"

Barnes, ignoring the heavy humor, spoke past Mitch to Davis and Walters. "There is a floor some three feet below the water level," he said. "The boys will not drown. But look at those walls, gentlemen. They're pre-Revolutionary stone, and three feet thick. I don't think you need be afraid that the boys will break through them."

"What is it?" Walters asked suspiciously. "A cellar?"

"I don't know. Just a pit of some sort, apparently. I must ask Mr. Hayworth's opinion of it-one day in the future." Barnes smiled calmly at Tod.

"Chuck," Davis ordered, "get down there and look it over."

"Who? Me?" Chuck drew back.

"Yes, you. You're already wet and muddy," Davis pointed out. "A little more water won't hurt you."

"You'll need a long ladder," Barnes pointed out. "You'll find one in the garage."

Muttering, Chuck went out.

"They can't put Dan and the boys in that hole!" Tod burst out. "They won't get enough air."

"It's a sizable place," Barnes said, still calm. "There's enough air in there for hours and we'll be back to let them out before dawn. Won't we, Davis?"

"Sure-sure," Davis said.

"He's lying," Tod insisted.

"He may be." Barnes spoke more sharply, as if he were tired of arguing. "I don't trust him any more than you do, but I think he's smart enough to keep his part of this bargain. The pit isn't the most pleasant place in the world, but it's safe. The water in it won't rise any farther-in fact, it will recede as the tide goes down. When water can get in, it can also get out, you know."

Ken was aware of Mr. Barnes' eyes on him as he spoke that last

sentence. But before he could meet the elderly man's glance, the eyes were focused on Tod again.

"So the boys and your young architect friend will be perfectly safe there until we return," Barnes concluded.

"If we return," Tod said.

Again Ken was aware that Arthur Barnes flashed him a swift glance as he said, "I'm depending on the boys to ensure that."

Walters looked up. "What's that? You're depending on the boys?"

"On their presence here," Barnes said smoothly. "They'll be found sooner or later. That's inevitable. So I don't think you'll double-cross us, because you'll know what it will mean for you."

"Gangway!" Chuck appeared in the doorway with a fifteen-foot ladder. Mitch helped him maneuver it into the trap-door opening and lower it until it struck the bottom of the pit. Only the top rung protruded above the floor.

Chuck took a flashlight and began a reluctant descent. "Grandpop's right," he called up. "There's three feet of water down here. It's kind of a round room, about ten feet across. With real solid stone walls, like Grandpop said."

"Look for some kind of an exit," Walters told him.

"No exit. I said the walls were solid, didn't I?" Chuck called. After a moment his head reappeared in the opening. "I guess it's a pretty safe hideaway, all right. This is the only way in or out, and they won't be able to reach the top here once we get the ladder pulled out."

"And we can pile a lot of stuff on top of the trap door, just to make sure," Ben pointed out.

"All right. That's settled," Davis said decisively. "We'll put those three"-he indicated Dan and the boys-"down there and take the rest of you on the boat. Now let's get organized. There's just one more little detail to take care of, and then we'll be ready to shove off. Mitch, I want you and Ben to get rid of both our cars. Drive them down to the ocean and run them off that fishing pier at the end of the road. Then wait for us on the pier and we'll pick you up there."

Once again a look of suspicion flooded Mitch's face. "You're sure you'll pick us up?"

Davis merely glanced at him, but the glance showed his sharp irritation.

Ben's voice was suddenly high and frightened. "Why don't you answer? I bet you're not going to come to the pier at all! You were just soft-soaping us a while back-now you're showing your true colors again. You're planning to clear out and leave us here!"

"I don't like it either, boss," Mitch said. "What's the matter with leaving the cars where they are?"

"Because they're perfectly clear advertisements of our presence,

you fool!" Davis told him. "Are you going to obey orders, or are you-?"

"I'm not going to risk obeying that one, boss." Mitch shook his head. "Run the cars off the piers yourself if you want to get rid of them."

They were quarreling again. Ken tried to take courage from that fact. But instead he found himself thinking that this determination to get rid of the cars meant that, somehow, Davis didn't intend to keep his word. If he had honestly agreed to Arthur Barnes' plan, he would realize that the police would learn from Mr. Barnes that the men had been at his lodge. Davis, in that case, would be trusting to the dark, to his seamanship and the size of the bay to protect him until he had made good his escape. Getting rid of the cars made it look as if Davis had hopes that the police would never learn of his use of the lodge-would never even have that much of a clue to direct their search outward from Delaware Bay.

Davis was deadly quiet. He seemed to be on the verge of another of his rages.

Walters stepped into the situation. "All right," he said, "we'll do it this way. I'll take one of the cars myself. One of you can take the other-I don't care who." The scorn in his voice suggested that he found little to choose from among the three henchmen. "And I'll take the box"-his eyes traveled to the lead case in the corner-"with me. Will that satisfy everybody that Red here will really stop for us at the pier?"

"O.K." Ben said after a moment. "That makes sense." He shot one last angry glance at Davis and then said to Walters, "I'll take the other car."

"If that's finally settled," Davis said, making an effort to control himself, "let's get going." With his own knife he cut the ropes that bound Tod's ankles, and Hawkins', and then he loosened Barnes' feet and hands from the chair to which they had been tied. "All right -up, all of you."

Tod and Hawkins got awkwardly to their feet, their hands still tied. Barnes stood up and rubbed his wrists.

"Chuck-Mitch-help me get them down to the boat," Davis ordered. He looked at Walters. "Watch the others until we get back, and then you and Ben can take off."

"Oh, no," Barnes said quietly. "The boys go down into the pit first. I want to take every possible precaution against any tricks you might play after we leave."

"Have it your way," Davis said impatiently. "Get on down, you three."

Walters jerked Dan to his feet. The bruise on Dan's forehead was

swollen now, and had turned a dark ugly purple. He stumbled at first and fell back against the wall, but he seemed conscious enough to know what was expected of him. Walters half-supported him to the edge of the pit.

At Davis' gesture Sandy went down first and helped Dan descend after him. Ken was the last one to lower himself down the ladder.

Almost before he took his hands from its rungs, the ladder was jerked up and out of the pit. For a brief instant, as they stared upward, they could see Walters' faint, amused grin. And then the trap slammed shut. They could hear furniture thudding on top of it, and faintly echoing footfalls that faded away. After that there was no sound but their own breathing.

"Barnes is a fool," Dan said weakly. His words echoed strangely in the stone-walled chamber. "We're goners, and so are he and Hawkins and Tod. They'll all be taken care of as soon as they hit the open bay. And we'll be left here forever-until we rot."

Ken took a deep breath. He felt certain Dan had read correctly the intentions of Davis and his gang. But he told himself that he and Sandy had been in tight spots before and somehow escaped.

"We're not licked yet," he snapped at Dan. "Mr. Barnes had some scheme up his sleeve, I'm sure of that." He found the small waterproof flashlight that was always in his pocket and turned its tiny brilliance on their prison. The little circle of light made a rapid circuit of the walls.

The huge dank stones were laid closely together, forming a solid enclosure that ringed them tightly in its circumference. The light reached up for the ceiling, far out of their reach, and then reflected from the water in which they stood.

Ken snapped off the light. "We'll save the battery while we think."

"Think!" Sandy echoed. "What's there to think about? Mr. Barnes himself said this was a dungeon we couldn't get out of-and he was right!"

# CHAPTER XVIII

## FIGHTING WITH FLAME

"Hang on to yourself!" Ken forced his voice to a loud harsh level. He had to make Sandy and Dan believe that they could get out of the stone pit, even if he was desperately uncertain of that conviction himself. He went on rapidly, "If that boat reaches the bay, Mr. Barnes and Tod and Hawkins are done for-and Mr. Barnes knows it. He didn't want Davis to realize he knew it, but he looked straight at me when he said he was depending on us. I'm pretty sure he didn't mean what he pretended to mean-that our 'presence' as hostages would save them. He doesn't expect Davis to honor this hostage idea. He's relying on us!"

"And just what does he expect us to do?" Sandy demanded. "Gnaw our way out of here? I tell you he said himself it was impossible to get out!"

"No, he didn't," Ken said firmly. "He said to Davis, 'I think you'll agree they can't get out.' And Davis did agree to it, which was exactly what Barnes wanted."

"But that guy they call Chuck looked all around in here-and he had a big light," Sandy pointed out. His thin strained voice bounced eerily back from the walls.

"Chuck's practically an idiot!" Ken snapped.

"And I'm afraid the old man was pretty confused," Dan said weakly. "I heard him say something about me being an architect, and he certainly knows better than that. He must just have been--"

Ken broke in. "I don't think he was confused. I think he was doing his best to give us hints-clues about how to get out of here. I think he deliberately called you an architect to let us know there was something down here an architect would know about. Try to think, Dan! Did lots of old houses have pits like this?"

Dan's voice showed the effort he was making. "I don't know, Ken! I don't even know what this could have been used for. It's obviously not a cellar-if its flooded like this."

"But he said the water would go down!" Sandy said suddenly. "He said something about the water finding a way out." He sounded excited, as if for the first time he had some faith in Ken's hope of discovering clues in Arthur Barnes' words.

"Now you're clicking!" Ken said. In the darkness he found Sandy's arm and gripped it hard. "If we can get out the same way the water does-!" He snapped the light on long enough to look at his watch. "Three minutes gone. We've got to do something-fast!"

“Give me the light.” There was a determination in Dan’s shaky voice that hadn’t been there before. “I’m not quite all there yet,” he added, as Ken handed him the flash, “but stop worrying about me now. I know we’ll make it, somehow.”

Dan made a rapid but careful circuit of the walls, running his hand over the heavy stone blocks and jabbing with one finger at the mortar that cemented them. “I think some early colonial houses had escape tunnels,” he said, as he worked. “Especially a house in an isolated neighborhood, that had no means of getting aid in case of attack by hostile Indians or other enemies ...” His voice trailed off as he concentrated on trying to discover a loose block or one that swung on a hinge.

But after spending precious minutes Dan found himself once again back at his starting point, having found no sign of what he was looking for.

“It’s no use.” Dan flicked the light off to save it, and the small flame of hope in the damp pit seemed to die with the glow.

“Wait a minute!” Ken said desperately. “There was something else. Barnes found out from Hawkins that the tide was about ready to turn before he told Davis about this place. Maybe that was a clue.”

Neither of the others spoke, and after a moment in the silent darkness, Ken said slowly, “Maybe there’s a way out of here that’s concealed at high tide. Maybe he meant he didn’t want Davis to see it unless—

Sandy shouted, and the stone walls echoed deafen-ingly. “There’s an escape route under the high water level! I bet that’s it!”

“Let’s find out,” Dan said. It was the grim voice of a man determined to try everything, but hopeless of the outcome. “I’ll go all the way around again and kick with my foot below the water line. If there’s any—” His words lost themselves in a slight splashing sound that was followed by utter silence.

“Dan! Ken-quick! The light!”

An instant later Sandy’s strong arms pulled Dan up out of the water and propped his sagging body against the wall. The rapidly failing gleam of the flash showed the deathly pallor of Dan’s face.

He coughed weakly. “Can’t-stand on one leg-yet,” he managed.

“Take it easy. I’ve got you,” Sandy said. He looked at Ken. “If I ever get my hands on that dirty thug—

“Don’t try anything when he’s got a gun.” Dan’s mouth twitched in a faint grin. “That’s what I did and got the muzzle over my eye.”

“Here, Ken, look after him,” Sandy said. “I’ll take over this kicking project.”

Again Ken turned the light out. Sandy didn’t need it. And they could follow his sloshing progress around the walls by his muttered,



"No ... no ... absolutely solid ... not a sign of-" He broke off short. There was a sudden more violent splashing sound. And then Sandy was shouting, "I've found it! A hole!"

"I'm all right," Dan said quickly, and Ken took him at his word.

Half-swimming, half-running, Ken crossed to where Sandy was standing and plunged his arm beneath the surface. His hand slid along a rock and was suddenly sucked around a corner!

"It's big!" Ken was shouting too. "And only a foot under the surface! You were right, Dan. It must be the entrance to an old escape tunnel."

"But if the whole tunnel is flooded-and since we have no way of knowing how long it is-we'll have to stay here until the tide goes down," Dan said. "And that'll be too late. So we're no better off than we were before."

"Maybe we are," Ken said. "Anyway, we can find out. I'll try it. Maybe the tunnel widens out in a few feet and there'll be air space above the water."

"But, Ken-" Sandy held his arm. "Suppose it doesn't?"

"Then I'll come back," Ken said firmly.

"Let me try it," Sandy begged. "I'm stronger. I-"

"Sure. But I can swim farther under water. Get away. Here goes."

Sandy knew from long experience the strength of Ken's determination. "All right. But take the light. It's not quite dead yet."

"All right. If there's a wider tunnel just beyond the wall, I'll blink the light and you can follow. Push Dan through ahead of you. I'll be ready to haul him out."

Ken filled his lungs to capacity and exhaled. Then he took a deep breath again, clamped the little flashlight tightly in his mouth, and lowered himself below the surface. For a moment there was an eerie glow in the water and then it vanished.

Sandy began to count the seconds, aloud. "One ... two ... three ... four ... five ... six ... seven ..."

Suddenly the water at the opening seemed to glow faintly. The glow disappeared almost before Sandy was sure he had seen it. Then it reappeared and disappeared again.

"He made it! He's signaling us to come on!" Sandy yelled. "Here, Dan. The hole's right here-feel it? I'll give you a good shove. Keep your arms out straight in front of you. Ken will grab them. O.K.? Then take a deep breath!"

Thirty seconds later all three of them were crouched in a tunnel nearly five feet high. There was a two-foot air space between the vaulted stone ceiling and the water.

"Come on!" Ken said. "Let's see where this goes."

He led the way, using the light only in brief flashes to conserve its

nearly exhausted battery. The tunnel seemed to slope downward slightly, for the water level rose as they moved on until it was lapping around Ken's shoulders. They were half-swimming, half-propelling themselves forward along the rough stone walls. It was impossible to keep their feet on the dangerously slimy stone floor.

From somewhere up ahead Ken suddenly heard what sounded like a dull muted throbbing. He halted abruptly and said, "Quiet! Listen!" as the others came up behind him.

"That's a boat engine!" Sandy breathed after a moment. "The *Kingfisher* must still be at the dock!"

Ken could feel his heart jump. They were in time after all! But they hadn't rescued the others yet and they didn't even know but what the tunnel might let them out close to the beach, in plain sight of those aboard the *Kingfisher*.

"All right," he whispered. "Come on. But keep it quiet."

The throb of the motor grew louder and more distinct as they moved forward, swimming with underwater strokes now in order to avoid splashing sounds. Sandy had supported Dan for the first part of the journey. Ken held him now, his arm crooked around Dan's head. Their progress seemed maddeningly slow.

And then suddenly the feeling of closeness around them seemed to vanish. For an instant Ken went limp with surprise and panic, unable to orient himself. And then he understood: they were beneath the Barnes boathouse, at the head of his dock. The simple wooden structure was built on piling that lifted its floor well above the high-water mark. But the creek bed sloped sharply there, and the shoreward end of the boathouse rested on the top of the bank under which the tunnel emerged.

Wordlessly Ken took one of Dan's arms and Sandy the other. They made their way to the far side of the boathouse opposite the dock. A moment later they were on shore and moving carefully around the end of the building to a point where they could see the *Kingfisher*, still tied to the dock twenty feet away.

"Stop stalling!" There was no mistaking Davis' gravelly voice. "I'll give you exactly one more minute to get that second engine started."

"If you know boats as well as you say you do," Hawkins answered with unexpected tartness, "you'll know how hard a job it is once the carburetor's flooded."

"Maybe Davis wants to try starting it himself." Barnes' suggestion was called toward the bridge from the forward cockpit.

Davis' next remark was inaudible, and the end of it was drowned out by the grinding of an electric starter.

"What do we do?" Sandy asked against Ken's ear.

Dan, breathing shallowly but otherwise apparently no worse for his

journey through the tunnel, whispered, "If we could get to town we could phone the Coast Guard. They could block the mouth of the creek."

"By the time we got there on foot and the Coast Guard came-No," Ken said. "They'd be out in the bay by then."

But he could think of no immediate alternative. There was no possibility of sneaking aboard and taking Davis and his friends by surprise. The sides of the *Kingfisher* were too tall to climb, and if they attempted to board her from the dock they would be seen long before they stepped on the deck.

"If we could distract their attention for a minute," he said under his breath, "maybe Tod and Barnes and Hawkins could do something themselves."

They could shout, of course, and reveal their own presence. But Ken knew what would happen in that case. They would probably be shot down in cold blood, and without having aided their friends at all.

"If we had gasoline maybe we could set her afire," Sandy said with grim hopelessness.

The exhaust sounds increased suddenly.

"The engine's started! We've got to do something!" Ken wasn't aware of whether he had said the words aloud or whether they were just shouting themselves in his brain.

"They're towing a dinghy, aren't they?" Dan whispered. "If you could get aboard that, couldn't you-?"

The engines picked up speed. The water swirled as the *Kingfishers* screw bit into it, and a wave slapped the beach.

Indecision held them paralyzed as they watched the *Kingfisher* ease away from the dock.

Dan's voice was a thread of sound. "It's too late!"

"No, it isn't!" Ken said suddenly. "Clem's dinghy's at the camp. Stay here, Dan. Come on, Sandy."

The *Kingfisher* was fifty feet from the dock now, still moving in reverse, dark except for her red and green running lights.

"But where-?" Sandy began.

"Come on!"

Ken didn't wait to see if Sandy was coming or not. He was running, bent low, through the tall spiky grass that edged the beach-running in the direction of the spit and the camp beyond it. The grass slashed at his arms and face, and tore at his flying feet. Ken stepped into a hole and went sprawling.

The sound of Sandy's stumble was the first indication that the redhead was directly behind him-so close behind that Sandy's whole weight suddenly fell on him. It almost knocked the breath out of his body. But they didn't waste time on words of apology. Sandy rolled

off, breathing hard, hauled Ken to his feet, and let him take the lead again.

Ken stopped just in time to keep from flinging himself against the barbed-wire fence. "Watch it!" he muttered. And as he felt Sandy behind him he added, "Here-I'm holding the wire up. Crawl under."

An instant later Sandy was holding the wire for him. And then they were pounding forward again.

Out on the creek the *Kingfishers* exhaust swelled in volume. Water gurgled and splashed as her screws went from reverse into forward. But they could no longer see her now. They had rounded the point of the spit.

"Head for the dinghy!" Ken panted, as they approached the camp. "Get it in the water-get the outboard set to go! I'll be right with you." There wasn't time to explain further.

He swerved sharply away from the water toward the tents. Sandy took one step after him, and then turned and raced for the beach and Clem's small boat, willing to follow Ken's instructions without understanding their purpose.

Ken joined him less than two minutes later. Sandy had the boat off the beach and was standing in water up to his knees, holding her steady. The outboard had been tilted down into operating position.

Ken splashed into the water, heedless of noise now. He had the camp's water bucket in his hand, and the fumes of gasoline that rose from it were so strong as to be almost visible. Ken placed the bucket in the bow of the boat and then leaped in himself, landing on the center seat.

"Come on, get in!" he said. "Sit here with me. Don't start the motor yet."

The dinghy tipped dangerously as Sandy lurched aboard. Then it righted itself and began to drift slowly downstream with the ebbing tide.

"What are you going to do?" Sandy's breath was still coming in short, sharp pants. "The minute they hear the motor they'll pin us down with a spotlight and shoot us out of the water."

"It would take them a couple of seconds to find us," Ken said almost absent-mindedly. "It's a chance we'll have to take." He was listening to the swelling throb of the big engines as the *Kingfisher* came nearer. She must be almost at the point of the spit now. In another moment they would be able to see her.

"But what are we going to do?" Sandy demanded.

Ken turned toward him. "We're going to create a diversion," he said grimly. "We're going to aim this dinghy right at the *Kingfisher* and keep her on that course until their spotlight picks us up. Then I'll drop a match in that bucket of gasoline and we'll jump!"

“But the gasoline will go up like a torch! And if that doesn’t blow us sky-high they’ll-“

Ken cut him off. “But it’s the only chance we’ve got! When they see that flame coming right toward them they’ll forget about Mr. Barnes and Hawkins and Tod for a second. I’m banking on one second being enough. I think Mr. Barnes will be expecting something.”

The exhaust was louder now.

“She’s coming around the point,” Ken said. “Have you got a better idea?”

“No.” Sandy’s voice was tight. “We’ll give it a try.”

“Get set to start the engine then,” Ken said. “Don’t jump until I give the word-and then go as far beyond the boat as you can and stay under as long as you can.”

Sandy nodded.

The throbbing sound suddenly came clear and full, and the *Kingfisher* rounded the bend.

“Ready?” Ken asked.

“Ready.”

“O.K. Start the engine.”

# CHAPTER XIX

## BATTLE IN THE WATER

Sandy yanked at the starter cord of the dinghy's small motor. The engine failed to respond. He pulled it a second time without results. Ken held his breath.

"Come on!" Sandy said between clenched teeth. Once more he tugged at it and this time the motor came alive with a roar. The dinghy lurched forward. Its blunt prow reared high and its stern almost sank below the water line under the thrust of the screw and the weight of its two passengers.

Sandy grabbed for the tiller and moved forward in an instinctive effort to trim the boat.

"Back!" Ken yelled. "Get back!"

Sandy obeyed. Then he swung the boat around and aimed it directly between the *Kingfisher's* running lights. Like Ken, he was perched on the gunwale of the tiny craft, as far to the stern as they dared go and still keep her afloat.

A thousand feet away across the dark waters the red and green lights winked at them as they came steadily forward.

Suddenly, high on the *Kingfisher's* flying bridge, a flashlight gleamed. Its pencil of light swung down over the water in a rapid circle. The boys ducked as the far tip of the beam passed over their heads. Then a second light in the forward cockpit joined the search. For an instant its glow illuminated Arthur Barnes' white head, leaning out of the cockpit.

The dinghy roared ahead. Spray flew back from its prow and the light shell shook with the motor's vibration.

Then a third flashlight came alive on the *Kingfisher* -this one far astern. As it swung wildly around it revealed Davis standing on the flying bridge. The man had a light in one hand, a gun in the other. His mouth was open wide, as if he were shouting loudly, but the boys could hear no sound except the noise of their own motor.

Now only five hundred feet separated the two boats. The *Kingfisher* had swung slightly, as if her helmsman had let his hand stray from her wheel.

By some miraculous chance none of the three flashlights touched the dinghy as she tore forward another hundred feet, although they were moving rapidly back and forth across the dark water like frenzied bloodhounds that had lost a scent.

Then suddenly the powerful searchlight atop the cabin roof blazed into dazzling brilliance.

“Get ready!” Ken yelled.

He crouched on the rear seat, his right hand closed tightly around the dozen matches he had snatched from the box beside Dan’s stove.

The *Kingfisher*’s huge searchlight bent sharply downward and swept toward them. They felt its hot brilliance envelop them, pass on, and then dart back to hold the dinghy steadily in its glow.

“Now!” Ken shouted. His hand scraped the match heads across the seat. There was a flare of light, pale in the searchlight’s brightness, as they ignited. “Jump!”

Ken hurled the flaming matches toward the bucket not four feet forward. Even before they landed in the gasoline they had ignited the fumes that were rising from the container. A geyser of flame erupted skyward.

The boys felt the searing heat as they plunged into the water. The backwash of its whooshing roar seemed to beat them deep below the surface. The outboard’s churning propeller sent waves of sound pounding against their ears, and their bodies were buffeted violently in the dinghy’s wake.

Ken fought his way upward. The water was quieting now. When he broke the dark surface he was almost a hundred feet astern of the bucking dinghy.

“Sandy!” Ken yelled. “Here!”

Ken swam swiftly across the space that separated them.

There was no need any longer for silence or secrecy. The dinghy was caroming forward like a riderless horse. The fifty-foot column of flame she sent up into the air washed the entire creek with a devilish red glare. Behind it, outside its brilliance, the boys were as safe from observation as if they had been literally invisible. Treading water, side by side, they watched the effects of the furious little fire ship they had aimed at the *Kingfisher*.

The cruiser was brilliantly illuminated now. On the flying bridge, beneath the searchlight that had tilted upward, Davis and Hawkins looked like tiny figures on a distant stage. They saw Davis wrench the controls out of Hawkins’ hands and swing the wheel hard to port. The big boat heeled sharply as it swerved shoreward to avoid the dinghy plunging toward its prow. Then they saw Hawkins raise his fist high in the air and bring it down once-twice-a third time. Davis released the wheel and spun toward him. Their bodies both disappeared from sight, dropping below the level of the bridge’s canvas spray shield.

In the forward cockpit Mitch was standing in the full glare, his left arm held protectively crooked before his face, his right thrusting a gun wildly forward. As the dinghy tore along, slicing yard after yard from the distance between it and the cruiser, Mitch shrank back. For an instant the tiny craft changed its course, swinging to port, and then it

swung back and headed again straight for the *Kingfisher*. Mitch leaped out of the cockpit, hung poised on the rail for a split second, and jumped.

He came up almost immediately and, with an energy born of panic, struck out for the beach. But his right hand still clutched the heavy gun and he swam awkwardly, flailing the water into foam but making little actual progress.

The *Kingfisher* was still heading shoreward, under the impetus of the powerful turn Davis had given the wheel. The dinghy, moving straight upstream, looked as if she would avoid the bigger craft altogether. But suddenly, as if directed by an unseen hand, she swung downstream and then swerved again and headed upstream once more on a new angle, as if to cut off any possibility of the *Kingfisher* regaining the channel. For an instant the boys could see Tod inside the cabin. He was beating furiously at the thick glass of a porthole.

“Look!” Sandy gasped. “On the bridge!”

Hawkins and Davis were visible again, standing upright now but locked together in a frantic struggle. Hawkins was slighter than his adversary, but he was slowly forcing Davis back toward the rail of the flying bridge.

Ken suddenly clutched Sandy’s shoulder and directed his gaze toward the *Kingfisher*’s stern. Chuck was there, his stout legs braced wide apart on the deck, as he aimed a gun at the struggling figures on the bridge. He didn’t fire. The two men were so close together that it was clear he couldn’t strike Hawkins without endangering his own chief. But he held his gun ready, waiting.

Then Davis seemed to weaken suddenly. Hawkins, still upright, bent the other man’s body backward, like a bow, across the rail.

Chuck sighted his gun carefully at the *Kingfisher*’s captain as the two figures on the bridge remained motionless for an instant.

And at that moment the *Kingfisher* struck mud. She heeled over abruptly as her forward progress came to a shuddering halt.

Davis catapulted off the bridge like a projectile. Chuck staggered, lost his balance, and toppled behind the rail.

And the little dinghy, as if aware that its job was done, swerved abruptly. In the space of a breath she had rammed herself against the opposite shore. The impact sprayed the naming gasoline upward in a wide fan that tripled the intensity of the light. The little outboard motor seemed to roar even louder for an instant, and then it died.

In what must have been a single swift gesture Hawkins had killed the cruiser’s engines and turned the searchlight down toward the water. It picked out Davis struggling toward the shore almost in the wake of his hireling, Mitch. Hawkins seemed poised for a leap into the water.



Ken yelled at him. "We'll get them!" In the sudden silence his voice seemed to fill the night. "But watch Chuck in the stern!"

As Ken raised his arm for a slashing stroke through the water he saw that Mr. Barnes had crawled aft along the canted cabin roof and was pointing a flashlight down at Chuck, just struggling to his feet. Hawkins wasn't using the ladder to descend from the bridge. He was leaping feet first onto the aft deck and his arms were encircling Chuck's pudgy figure even before he landed.

"I'll take Davis!" Ken shouted over his shoulder at Sandy as he started to swim toward the two figures in the water. "Mitch is yours!"

"A pleasure!" Sandy roared.

At top speed, with Ken in the lead, they cut through the water at an angle that would bring them between the slowly swimming men and the shore they were heading for.

Davis was tiring fast. Every inexperienced thrashing of his arms weakened him further. He cast one frightened look over his shoulder, full into the glare of the searchlight, and suddenly seemed to collapse.

"Help!" he called feebly. "Help!" Then his head sank below the surface between two white hands that clutched at nothing.

Ken was almost beside him. He swung wide and came up from behind. His left hand grasped Davis' shoulder. Suddenly those white hands reached for Ken's face. Ken spun the man around, drew back his right arm, and was ready to strike as his left hand hauled the head above the surface. His fist landed squarely on a sagging jaw. Davis' head snapped back and again he started to sink. Ken caught him, turned him over on his back, and grabbed his thatch of short hair so that he could drag him ashore. But first he looked around to see if Sandy had yet reached Mitch.

Sandy was nowhere in sight. But Mitch was only fifty feet away, treading water, his head swiveling around wildly and his gun held ready to shoot.

"Sandy!" Ken yelled.

The shout brought Mitch's gun around toward Ken. And just then Sandy's head broke the surface, less than a dozen feet beyond the gangster.

Mitch heard the splash and turned quickly. But before he could bring the gun to bear, Sandy had taken a breath and vanished again.

"I'll get you!" Mitch screamed. "I'll--"

The last word drowned in a gurgle. Mitch's head had suddenly sunk below the surface, as if he were a kind of reverse jack-in-the-box. And then the water at that spot became alive.

A brief moment later Sandy erupted like a porpoise, his face set as he struggled to imprison the flailing arm that held the gun. In a desperate left-handed grab he caught only the man's wrist, but that

was all he needed. He pulled the wrist down, and with his right hand twisted the gun out of the man's frenzied grasp. The weapon splashed into the water and sank.

Not until then did Sandy allow the man's head to emerge above the surface. Mitch was no longer belligerent. He spluttered and gasped, reaching for Sandy in a frantic effort to keep himself afloat.

"Watch him!" Ken warned. "He'll pull you under."

Sandy thrust both hands at Mitch's shoulders and held him out and away from his own body. Then he jerked one arm back and jabbed it forward again. His fist connected solidly. Mitch sagged.

"O.K." Sandy panted. "I can get him ashore now."

He and Ken both turned toward the beach then and noticed for the first time that the shore line was illuminated by the headlights of two cars parked near the tents. Two powerful flashlights added to the glare. A chorus of shouts suddenly sounded.

"Walters! And Ben!" Sandy gasped. "Duck!"

"No, wait!" Ken was peering into the blaze of light.

Four men stood on the shore, their figures outlined in the light. "They're wearing uniforms!" Ken said. "They're--"

"This is the State Police!" A single voice roared above the confusion. "Come on in out of that water! You're covered!"

And another voice said, "We're looking for Ken Holt and Sandy Allen!"

For a moment Ken wasn't sure he could call out an answer. Relief flooded through him like a wave, draining out the last of his strength. But his faint words carried clearly enough across the narrow stretch of water.

"Here we are," he said.

Sandy was already towing Mitch shoreward. "I wish you'd started looking for us an hour earlier," he panted.

Ken turned his head in the hard light that was beating down on them and looked at Sandy's face a few feet away across the water. Suddenly he grinned. "But as we always say," he gasped, between strokes, "better late than never."

## CHAPTER XX

### BACK TO THE DIGGING

In the first rays of the morning sun the archaeological camp site on the shores of Claytown Creek seemed placid and serene. The police had already left with their prisoners, including Walters and Ben whom they had had no difficulty in arresting on the far end of the fishing pier. The lead box, full of packages of bills, was also in police hands. And a Coast Guard cutter was making for a certain deserted spot along the Maryland coast where-Mr. Barnes had overheard Davis tell Walters-Roger Finn and Louis Gorman were hopefully awaiting their confederates.

A Global News car, which had arrived from Philadelphia with Richard Holt and Tom Golden only half an hour behind the State Police, had already departed carrying Ken's story and Sandy's undeveloped films of the night's events. Golden had departed with it, after a wry remark to Holt that he guessed he was no longer needed.

Only the *Kingfisher*, still stuck in the mud, and the burned wreck of the dinghy across the creek, remained as visible evidence that anything unusual had occurred.

The smell of fresh-made coffee filled the cool morning air. Dan, still pale and wearing a sizable bandage around his head, had nevertheless managed to construct a towering pile of sandwiches. From his own chair he started it around a circle consisting of Richard Holt, Tod, and Mr. Barnes-seated in the dig's only other chairs-and Hawkins and the boys, near them on the ground.

Sandy took two as the plate went past him. "I'll tell you one thing," he said, after his first mouthful, "I'm a changed character. Here I've always gone around saying coincidences don't happen-that when we run into something that looks like a coincidence, we ought to be suspicious right away. But after last night, I'm cured. Boy, what a coincidence! That the very place we pick as a safe refuge turns out to be the same spot chosen by the men we're trying to avoid!" He shook his head and had another mouthful. "It's enough to make a man lose his faith in human nature."

Holt's eyes, serious and thoughtful, rested first on Sandy and then on Ken. "I'm a changed man too," he said. "I think I must have aged at least ten years last night when I got the message from Granger about that phone call."

"Phone call?" Mr. Barnes' white eyebrows lifted. "That's a part of the story I haven't caught up with."

Holt proceeded to explain how Ken's query to the Global News

office about a possible call from the Claytown Inn, on the night it was broken into, had set a dozen wheels to turning. Granger's check had proved that such a call was made and that it had been made to a suspected hide-out of the Walters-Davis-Finn-Gorman gang in Philadelphia. Granger, instantly suspicious, and alarmed for the boys, had called Pop Allen to learn the boys' exact whereabouts, phoned Holt in Philadelphia, and put the State Police on the job.

"Too bad we didn't all get here a little sooner," Holt concluded. "The situation was pretty well under control by the time the police arrived-or so they tell me."

"Yes, it was." Mr. Barnes looked proudly at his grizzled captain. "Thanks to John, here. And especially to you two boys," he added to Ken and Sandy.

Sandy, embarrassed as usual by praise, said, "Well, we'd still be in that pit under your lodge if you hadn't given us the clues to the tunnel. Ken was the one who kept insisting that's what you'd done," he pointed out. "I'd about decided we were goners."

"I had too," Dan admitted. "And I was dead-beat besides, and no help at all."

"I was no help, either," Tod said, "locked up in that cabin behind that shatterproof glass."

They all looked gratefully at Ken, until Ken himself turned red. "Look," he said, "Mr. Barnes is really the hero of this business. If he hadn't stalled the men off with all that talk, until the tunnel entrance was covered over by the tide-" He stopped, floundering, and Tod came to his rescue.

"One thing that's still confusing to me," the archaeologist said, running his hand through his yellow stubbly hair, "is why a car stayed so long down at the sea end of the road that night, after the fire. Remember? It had just passed me when I came back here after taking Clem to town."

Ken, feeling better now that the spotlight of attention had swung elsewhere, said, "Chuck explained that, didn't he, Dad?"

Holt nodded. "Yes, Chuck was doing a lot of talking even before the police got around to questioning him. He said that he and Walters were supposed to dig up the money that night, after the fire-presumably-had driven all of you people away from here. Afterward they were supposed to join Davis, Mitch, and Ben down at the fishing pier at the end of the road. Davis' cruiser was due to come by for them in the early hours of the following morning."

"I get it." Tod grinned. "But we didn't fall in with their plan-the fire didn't drive us away. And the Federal men had a plan of their own, and seized Davis' boat before it could leave Philadelphia."

Holt nodded. "That's what happened." He grinned sympathetically.

"It seems tough that when you have so little money to carry on your dig here you had to take time off to help rescue somebody else's million dollars."

Tod brushed the thought away with a wave of the hand. "We're glad to oblige, any time," he said. "And I suppose it was then-when Davis' boat didn't turn up -that the men decided to hole up in Mr. Barnes' lodge." He looked over at the sportsman. "And then you came along, in that fine cruiser of yours, and they realized the *Kingfisher* would do instead."

"I wonder if Davis has talked by now," Ken said. "You're still counting on him or one of the other three to lead you to the top man in this whole crime syndicate, aren't you, Dad?"

Holt looked at his watch. "I am indeed-and so is the grand jury. But we can catch a news broadcast in five minutes and maybe that'll give us the answer to your question."

From around the spit, washed now in the gold of the early-morning sunshine, the throb of an outboard sounded. The sound swelled in volume, and Clem's skiff appeared and headed for the camp site. A few minutes later Clem's slight figure was walking up the slope toward them. He kept glancing back over his shoulder at the stranded *Kingfisher*.

"Mornin'!" he called out, when he was still some distance away. "I decided to come along early today, to make sure you folks hadn't been bothered by those snoopers again last night. But what happened to-?" His eyes fell on John Hawkins and he grinned. "Hi, John! Don't you know that creek well enough by now to cruise around without pilin' yourself up?"

Then he saw Mr. Barnes and the unfamiliar face of Richard Holt, and blinked confusedly.

Hawkins spoke before Clem could ask further questions, or before anybody else could answer him. "Oh, I just made a little error," he said cheerfully. "Nothing like as bad as the one you seem to have made, though. We can float the *Kingfisher* off, all right. But looks as though your dinghy's ruined for good." He pointed to where the charred little craft lay, barely visible from where they sat. "Don't you know that creek well enough by now-?"

But Clem had seen the dinghy and was shouting "Jumpin' catfish!" Then he swung back. "Anybody hurt when she burned?" He noticed the bandage on Dan's head. "Was it you, Dan?"

Dan didn't answer. Clem's eyes flashed around the circle, but no one volunteered any information. "What goes on around here?" Clem demanded. "Jumpin' catfish! What's happened?"

Holt stood up, grinning, and stretched out his hand. "Hello, Clem. I'm Ken's father. I've heard a lot about you."

"Howdy." Clem bobbed his head. "And I've heard plenty about you, too. But right now what I'd like to know, if you'll excuse me, is just what the jumpin' catfish has been--"

Holt took his arm. "Come on. Let's you and I go up to the car and turn the radio on. We'll both get the story."

The boys looked after them for a moment. Hawkins was speaking quietly to Mr. Barnes, who nodded as if in agreement. Then Barnes turned to Tod and Dan.

"I hope you haven't seen all you ever want to see of the foundations under the lodge, Dan," he said. "I'm hoping you and Tod will take a serious look around my place while you're here-and anywhere on the grounds that you want to as well."

"Of course we'd like to look your place over," Tod told him. "Wouldn't we, Dan?"

Dan grinned. "I'm not keen on looking over your subterranean swimming pool again," he said. "But I must admit that stonework fascinates me, preferably without ghostly horses galloping around," he added.

"That reminds me," Sandy said suddenly. "Where's that portable phonograph the police took off the cruiser? Didn't they leave it here?"

"They did temporarily," Ken told him. He grinned. "Why? Do you want to play it for Clem?"

"I certainly do."

They had the little phonograph set up and ready to play by the time Holt and Clem returned from the car.

"Davis is talking all right," Holt said, as he neared the group. "No details are being given out yet, but wholesale arrests are already being made and certain men in high places-one in particular, I gather-are expected to be in the net when it finally closes." He turned to Ken and Sandy. "And there's one thing more. There's a reward for the return of the stolen bank funds. No amount was mentioned, but I'd guess you two can buy yourselves a new convertible, maybe even several of them."

"A new convertible!" Sandy exclaimed. "Wow!"

"I guess we could use a new one," Ken agreed. "But we sure don't need two of them, do we, Sandy?"

"Huh?" Sandy looked perplexedly across at Ken. Then he caught his friend's imperceptible nod in Tod's direction. He grinned widely. "No," he said. "We don't need two cars. Anyway, we don't rate the reward by ourselves. All of us were in it together."

"Nonsense," Tod said firmly. "That reward is all yours and Ken's."

"No, it's not," Ken said stubbornly. "Part of it is going to finance the dig here."

"Don't be silly," Dan said. "You two did all the detecting, so you

take the reward.”

“Better not argue with them,” Holt advised. “A Missouri mule is a nice tractable animal compared to those two when they decide to be stubborn about anything. And, anyway, I must say I think they’re right in this case.”

“Well,” Tod said, “well-well, if that’s the way ...” Hawkin’s dry voice cut off the stammering. “I’m glad that’s settled,” he said, “because I’d like to say something to Clem.” He turned to face his friend. “Remember that little boat you took quite a fancy to at the boat show last winter?”

“What?” Clem blinked. “Sure I do. Why?” “That’s the boat Mr. Barnes is going to get you-the boat and the motor that went with it.”

“What! Oh, no, there’s no cause for him to do any such thing. Why-“

Mr. Barnes interrupted Clem’s vehement speech. “In my opinion there is, Clem. Your dinghy saved my life-and I put quite a value on my life. You may not agree with me, of course, but I think it’s worth the price of that boat Hawkins told me about.”

“Well, jumpin’ catfish,” Clem said weakly, “I don’t know what to say. That boat costs more than I make in a year. Hardly seems-” He stopped dead and his jaw dropped. The sound of galloping ghostly hoofs was in the air. It rose and fell and rose again.

Clem spun around, eyes wide. Ken was kneeling beside the little phonograph, turning the crank and grinning up at the fisherman. He let the record spin around a few more times and then raised the needle and stopped it.

“That,” he said, “is positively the final appearance of the galloping horse ghost of Claytown Creek.”

Clem swallowed. “Oh, no, it’s not!” he said and began to chuckle. “It’s going to appear at least once more-for Josh and Lige Wilkins. Wait till they hear that! Just wait!”

“Hey!” Sandy protested. He turned on Dan and Tod. “Are you going to hire the Wilkins brothers-when you’ve got Ken and me?”

Tod looked at him and then at Ken. “But I assumed you’d be leaving, now that everything is cleared up.”

“I’d certainly like to be here when you dig up the first piece of glass,” Ken told him. “How about it, Dad? Do you think you could persuade Pop to give Sandy and me a short vacation?”

“I could try,” Holt said, smiling. “Somehow, I don’t think it will be too tough a job.”

“And if we really find the glasshouse site,” Ken went on, “it ought to make a swell yarn for Global News. Don’t you think so, Dad?”

“I certainly do,” Richard Holt agreed.

Even Granger agreed, finally. When the story was in his hands

some weeks later, he said, "Well! This isn't the sort of thing I usually get from Holt and Allen, but it's real news. And besides, it justifies all those reverse-charge calls I accepted while they were enjoying themselves fishing."

"Fishing!" Ken told him. "For your information, archaeology is about fifty percent digging and fifty percent detection. And they're both hard work."

"In fact," Sandy said loftily, "it requires such a high degree of intelligence that any other form of detection would seem elementary to us now."

But there was nothing elementary about the problem Ken and Sandy had to face when they found themselves involved, not long afterward, in *The Mystery of the Green Flames*.

THE END

THE MYSTERY OF THE GALLOPING HORSE

A KEN HOLT Mystery, no. 9

By Bruce Campbell